

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1984</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 8, 1984	"A Sermon on the Baptism of Our Blessed Lord"	Matthew 3:13-17
January 15, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: Samuel Johnson"	Luke 12:48
January 22, 1984	"Favorite Texts: William Gladstone"	Psalm 17:8
January 29, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: Josephine Butler"	Luke 7: 37
February 5, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: Allen Gardiner"	Psalm 51:10
February 12, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: George Fox"	John 8:12
February 19, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: Leo Tolstoy"	Matthew 6:33
February 26, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: Richard Baxter"	Luke 18:13
March 4, 1984	"Something To Remember"	Matthew 17:1-9
MISSING March 5, 1984	Untitled	John 14:6
March 11, 1984	"On Jesus-The Only Way"	John 14: 1-7
March 18, 1984	"To Seek the Lost"	Luke 15:1-32
March 25, 1984	"Through an Open Door"	John 10:1-9
April 1, 1984	"Who Are You, Jesus: "Bread of Life"	John 6:35
May 6, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: Fyoder Dostoyevsky"	Luke 15:11-32
May 13, 1984	"When Is A Home Christian?"	Luke 2:41-52
June 10, 1984	"The Set of the Soul"	Revelation 2:10
June 17, 1984	"Favorite Text of Famous Persons: Blaise Pascal"	Jeremiah 2:13
August 12, 1984	"To Pray Aright"	Romans 8:26-27
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September 9, 1984	"Nothing But The Facts"	Matthew 15:21-22

"A SERMON ON THE BAPTISM
OF OUR BLESSED LORD"

Mat. 3:13-17

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Hear now that passage of Scripture upon which this sermon is based, the title:
"A Sermon On The Baptism of Our Lord

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan
to be baptized by John. John would have pre-
vented him, saying, I need to be baptized by
you, and do you come to me?"

But Jesus answered him, Let it be so now,
for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all
righteousness.

And then he consented. And when Jesus was
baptized, he went up immediately from the
water; and behold, the heavens were opened and
he saw the Spirit of God descending like a
dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice
from heaven saying, This is my beloved son in
whom I am well pleased . . . "

Preachers come under occasional ridicule. Sometimes it's fully justified. Other times it is totally unfair, to say the least. Here's an example of ridicule by some modern cynic: "The average preacher today spends far too much time answering questions that no one is asking." For shame upon the cynic, the cynic who never bothers to concern himself as to the validity of the questions that aren't being asked.

Perchance that could be the role of the 20th-century pulpit here, to provide not only the correct answers, but also to see that the proper questions are being raised, and brought to people's attention. At the risk of some measure of ridicule, let me now attempt to answer a question which presumably very few, if any, of you has ever raised - Why did Jesus ever leave home?

It was a happy home. He was contented there, He was useful, He had a measure of responsibility. It wasn't that He was an irresponsible person. Today's Scripture - - "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan . . ." - - that means He left home....

-- are you aware of the fact that He had been home now
for some 30 years of His life?

-- are you aware of the fact that this is the first specific reference in the Scriptures to the life of Jesus Christ from the time that Luke referred to Him in the second chapter, as a pre-teenager who went up to the temple with His parents, and presumably He was lost, and they found Him...."and he went back home, and was subject to his parents. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man . . . "which is simply to suggest: He grew up!

And then after 18 years -- at 30 years of age -- He leaves home. You've never asked the question: Why should anyone leave home?

Why did my father, of blessed memory, at 18 years of age leave the village in the hills beyond once-beautiful Beirut, to come at the turn of the century to America? . . . I used to ask him that question. And he answered me: "There was something going on over here . . . "....and he wanted to be part of it.

Would you allow me to suggest that maybe that's why Jesus left Nazareth? -- maybe that's why He left home, because something great and wonderful was going on beyond Nazareth, and He wanted to be part of it.

Do you know what it was that was going on? -- a cousin of his, a great preacher, a revivalist, preaching up a storm -- hellfire, brimstone, damnation -- they hadn't heard anything like that for centuries, in fact for 400 years, according to Scriptures, the voice of the prophet had been silenced. And now there comes this strange character, John the Baptist, from the wilderness -- preaching with the voice of a prophet.

People became scared, they came under conviction. He said, "You've got to turn around, you've got to repent, you've got to be baptized!" And he was known as the Baptizer, this preacher of hellfire, brimstone, and damnation.

Presumably Jesus had heard of this. He wanted to meet His cousin John. He wanted to see first-hand for Himself what was going on, and undoubtedly to give him a measure of comfort and encouragement. And that's no small thing! -- to get from where you are to where you ought to be, to speak the encouraging word to somebody else, who's taking a stand that is involved in the Movement of God -- ah! there you have it! It was this Movement for God abroad throughout the land, and Jesus wanted to be part of it.

" . . . and when he came to John . . . " You can read this in the passage of

Scripture for yourself and meditate upon it earnestly -- He offered Himself as a candidate for baptism. And John, fully perceptive as he was, was taken by surprise -- "You want me to baptize you! -- I should be baptized by you! -- for your baptism is going to be far greater than my baptism of water."

Now ask yourself this question -- you ought to ask questions:

-- Why should Jesus want to be baptized, the sinless One?

...that's what we say of Him, and we believe it. John's baptism was for sinners, John's baptism was for people who said, "We're truly sorry for what we have done and we're caught up in the wickedness of the world and we assume a measure of responsibility . . . and we want to make it as a matter of record that we're ashamed of ourselves and we want new life . . . and as a measure of that new life we're willing to be baptized and be submerged, even in the dirty water of the Jordan."

Now ask yourself the question: Why did Jesus want to be baptized? He was without sin -- say it again and ever so often -- and the Church clings tenaciously to that. Would you allow me to suggest this for an answer? -- why did He come from Heaven above to earth at all? Why did He want to get soiled up with us? -- a rather unsavory lot, really! -- -- because He wanted to identify with us. Who wants a Savior who is detached from the world? Who wants a God who can't come to us where we are? And so He gives us to understand He wants to identify with us, in our wickedness -- He becomes one-with-us.

Two things: He becomes one-with-us, sinners though we may be; and,
He becomes one-with-us in the noble thrust that's being let
loose in the world, this tremendous movement toward God,
there was a great revival, and He could not allow Himself
to be detached from it.

....so Jesus leaves home, and becomes identified now with this great program, this great movement, this thrust for God.

I think also, as I read between the lines, that all the while He was in Nazareth He was no less God. You must never forget that: all the while He was in Nazareth He was no less God....

...He was God as He was making yoke for oxen...

...He was God as He was walking around ankle-deep in those
wood shavings in the carpenter shop in Nazareth, of course
He was....

...He was no less God before He preached His first sermon....

...He was no less God before He was baptized....

But all during these years, this time of preparation, He was moving toward that moment when the decision would be made in no uncertain way, as to who He was and what He was meant to do. And I suggest to you, in the life of every single leader who has been worth his salt, in the life of every single leader who has made a significant contribution to world history, I think it can be said: there has been that moment of awareness, that time of realization, as to Who I am, and What I am meant to do - - to see also that time of identification is something great and wonderful with something that's going on.

When I list the number of great ones whose shadow has been cast benignly upon me, I think of that man that I met only briefly. He was a primate of the Church of Norway during World War II. I met him when I first went to ^{Europe} ~~rope~~ in 1947, not long after the war. We stood in the shadow of St. Lawrence Church, the first cathedral to be built in northern Europe. He was Bishop ^{EVANG} Evird Berggrav(?) Why do I remember him? When the Nazis occupied Norway and they tried to get the Church of Norway under their control, to kowtow to them, and they gave all kinds of threats and intimidation....and when they thought their ace card would be this, when they said to the primate, they said to Bishop ^{EVANG} Evird Berggrav, "If you will not adhere to what we ask of you, then we will imprison twelve of your bishops, and we ask now that you give us the list of the twelve - - sign their names immediately."

...Berggrav took a piece of paper, wrote the names of eleven bishops of the Church of Norway, and then he wrote the first name at the head of the list - - it was the name of Evird ^{EVANG} Berggrav....

There does come a time when a person must take a stand, willingly to identify.

And when Jesus did that, when He was baptized, the heavens opened, a dove descended, hovered over His head, a subjective spiritual experience. There's reason to believe that nobody else was aware of it except Jesus. And while it was happening, it became known to Him who He was, and what He was meant to do. And the voice from heaven said, "You are mine! You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

For anyone who has ever made his mark there has been that sublime moment of vision. For anyone who has ever contributed significantly there has always been that time when the vision has been followed by faithful obedience. Ask yourself this question, for shame if you have never asked it! - - How could Jesus Christ have persevered as He did, completely and perfectly as God's Son, even to the cross and beyond? - - He never for a moment forgot who He was. And He never allowed

Himself to go on without being sustained and strengthened by this conviction.

No sermon should be preached if it can't be helpful to the person in the pew. No sermon should be preached if it can't be helpful to the man who is preaching it. So the question has to be asked: In my baptism, have I become fully aware of who I am? Am I strengthened and sustained daily in the realization that I am a child of God? -- meant to do God's work -- meant to be caught up in God's movement?

I could become cynical at my age, honestly I could. I preached a New Year's Eve sermon not so long ago based on the text: Is there anything new under the sun? At my age I could say fairly well, I've seen it all before! -- another year, just another series of trials and tribulations, problems and perplexities, disillusionment and despair, defeat and despondency -- I have seen it all before. Why am I more in love with life than I've ever been before? My baptism becomes increasingly real to me -- exceedingly precious. Sure, I have feet of clay, sure I fumble and falter, and even when I try to be best, I blunder. But I'm still God's child, I do know Him! And I'd be less than grateful if I didn't thank you for reminding me, by your hope and your trust.

John Oxenham once said, "To every man there openeth a way, and ways, and a way; and the high soul gropes the low highway, and the low soul gropes the low, and in between the rest drift to and fro. But to every man there openeth a highway and a low, and each man decides the way his soul shall go."

...and the grand and glorious thing about deciding for the high way is because God is always there ahead of you, saying, "I have called you, I need you! " . . . and what is more precious than anything else: "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you."

...this I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS: WILLIAM GLADSTONE"

(Psalm 17:8)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

What would you do, if - - - ? Surely that question's been put to you on more than one occasion as someone tried to find out how you would react in a particular situation. What would you do, if . . .

- - if you were 30 years of age, and having reached 30, you discovered that most of the people that you knew were already married, and had their family started well on their way, and you were not married?

...not only that, what would you do if you had already asked two women to marry you, and you had been rejected twice?

Well, you could do what William E Gladstone did, you could ask the third woman. In his case, she responded, and to all intents and purposes, it was one of the most wonderful things that ever happened to him, because she proved herself a worthy mate - - devout Cristian, a good mother for their eight children, and a companion as he charted his course in the political arena.

What would you do, if . . .

- - having gone away to college, you return home nobly intentioned, and you say to your family that you've made a decision, you want to become a Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you want to become a candidate for Holy Orders, to become a priest of the Anglican Church.....only to discover that your family, to a person, are in total disagreement, and your father, whom you highly regard, is about to dissuade you, and to dissuade you successfully.

What would you do, if . . .

- - you were William Ewart Gladstone, and you came home from Oxford, only to discover that no one had any enthusiasm at all, but to the contrary, they talked you out of your noble intention to become a priest of the Church?

Well, perhaps you might not find yourself in either of these situations, but William Gladstone did. Now how did he handle the second? He must have reasoned within himself, and very properly so . . .

" I am a Christian, and I don't have to be a priest of the Church to demonstrate my Christian conviction. If I don't become a Minister of the Gospel, then I will apply the Gospel in my daily life" . . . and he went into the political arena.....

He served Parliament for over 60 years. He was named Prime Minister on four different occasions. Historians have agreed that of all the people who served England over a 200-year period, none excelled him in statesmanship, and none applied moral and spiritual principles in their daily life to the degree that he did.

So what would you do, if, you were dissuaded from going into the ministry? You would be convinced, as though you should be, that one doesn't have to be ordained, one doesn't have to wear the cloth, to serve one's Lord effectively and to serve one's Lord well.

For shame upon us if we permit ourselves to believe that only the ordained and the set-apart do the work of the Lord. It was one of the things with which Martin Luther contended, and contended handsomely, in his day, when devout Roman Catholics believed that unless you became a priest or a nun, you did not do the Lord's work. And Martin Luther shook up a lot of people when he gave them to understand that even the shoe repairman, the cobbler who takes a pair of shoes and does his work honestly and well, performs a work as sacred in God's sight as the priest who stands with folded hands in prayer before the altar.

In like manner, Archbishop William Temple in his day jolted people when presumably he was addressing a number of folks who were allowing them to think that God placed a high value upon institutional religion, which undoubtedly He does, but not at the expense of other things. And when Archbishop William Temple was dealing with these people who were thinking that unless you did the Lord's work within the institutional church you were doing something of lesser value. And how did he jolt them? - - by that famous one-liner: "God has a lot of other things in which He's interested beside religion."

...so Gladstone reasoned, and reasoned well, "If I do not become a priest, then I will live as a priest! - and be faithful to my Lord in my day's work in the political arena."

We prize, here in Saint Luke Church, a number of things that are the work of one man's hands. Much that you see in front of you by way of re-furbishing touches that was done back in the 1960's, the late 60's, the re-decoration of the chancel -- all of the work in the Chapel of The Grateful Heart -- was done by the master-mind of Ellwood Francis DeLong....who in his impressionable years wanted very much to be a preacher. And then he said to himself, "Maybe I can't preach with words, so then I'll let my hands preach for me." One doesn't have to wear the cloth to do the Lord's work.

As I walked out in the recessional at the 8:30 service this morning, in that 4th or 5th pew to the left sat two of our newest, youngest staff members in Saint Luke, Alma Louise Hornung and Ginny Ann Smith. Neither wears the veil of the deaconess, neither has been set aside, ordained as a pastor of the Church -- we have more than 100 women now in the Lutheran Church in America who are serving as pastors . . . neither one has been set apart as members of holy orders. And yet I dare say to you, as I know something of the manner of and dedication and the nature of their work, no deaconess perchance would serve with greater devotion, and no pastor of the Church would go about her work with greater zeal than these two.

...and I think quickly of our Nan Sheets, a missionary in India, going about her work with commitment, without benefit of holy orders... This is the lesson we learn from William Gladstone as he lost himself completely and gave himself earnestly to his Christian commitment in the world of politics.

Now the third question: What would you do, if --

...you discovered that, for want of a better term -- as a practicing Christian, or as one who practices your Christian faith in your day's work, you were not always appreciated, and sometimes your motives were questioned? -- and your deeds and acts misinterpreted?

And what would you do, if --

...your fortunes waxed and waned? -- and all the time you were permitting yourself to believe that you were doing the Lord's work?

What would you do, if --

...you discovered, much to your dismay, that the Queen whom you served loyally was no longer supportive? -- and with great difficulty controlled her emotions when you were in her presence, lest she give evidence of her dislike and show her disfavor?

What would you do, if --

...because of your Christian commitment, because you were completely dedicated to doing the right thing in the sight of God, you were voted out of

office?

What would you do, if - -

...on occasion you discovered that you had to change your mind? -- as he did -- once favoring the abolition of the income tax, and then while he was still in office, coming back and saying, "This is an unwise thing to do - - if we are going to win the Crimean War, then we've got to double the taxation . . .

And what would you do, if - -

...only a little while later you came back to your people and you said, "It's a mistake to wage this war any longer, and I encourage you to withdraw our troops."

What would you do, if - -

...politically speaking, you find favor in the eyes of people when you say, "We've got to be firm with the Russians" - - as he did in his day with a dispute over the Aghanistan border....only to discover that the same electorate were taking you to task, because you were also saying, "We've got to cut down on our defense spending." - - - it's almost as current as yesterday, this morning, tomorrow.

What would you do, if - -

...you were trying earnestly to plot your course, and to apply your Christian commitment in your day's work, and it wasn't always being appreciated - - not even by the sovereign whom you wanted so much to serve?

What would you do, if - -

...your own political party would turn against you and you found yourself not being trusted and respected by any segment of political parties?
...one calls you a renegade, another distrusts you because you had a label ten years earlier that you don't carry now? And all because, no matter what the condition or circumstance would be, you were trying to apply at that time in that instance what you believed to be the Christian thing to do?

For sixty years he was a member of Parliament . . . four times Prime Minister. His fortunes waxed and waned.....

What would you do, if - -

...as one in high office you were walking down the street - - not going to church, not going to the House of Commons . . . but you passed by a women of the street - - how would you apply your Christian commitment?

It's one thing to mouth what you believe when you sometime sanctimoniously stand in the presence of people. But when the harlot's in the gutter, how do you respond? There was a marvelous consistency in that man's life. He and his wife agreed together that they would support a rescue home, a shelter for women of the streets. And together they would go and visit these people and they would read Scripture to them, and they would pray with them, and they would do everything they could to persuade them to change their lives...by the grace of God.

This sermon is another in the series of "Favorite Texts of Famous Persons"... now the text that became a lodestar for this man's life. You need to understand, and to understand it well, that his life was permeated by Scripture. In his diaries he has recorded again and ever so often that at every significant point in his life it was a passage from Scripture that sustained him and nourished him. What do you suppose was the inscription hanging over his bed at Haywarden, where he lived as often as he could? - -

"Keep me under the shadow of thy wings"

...what do you suppose was the text that he wrote when Lady Battersley, who was a guest in his home, had an autograph book - -

-- do you remember those days of autograph books? there was something to be said for them. As a teenager I had one . . I've lost it long since, for shame, but I remember when as an impressionable teenager at Camp Nawakwa, Dr. Michael Hadlon Fisher's mate, Mrs. Fisher, wrote in my autograph book what I remember to this day and I hope to my dying day: "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

...there's a great deal to be said for that time when we had autograph books, when some people shared with some measure of inspiration to which we could return again and again to fortify the soul....

...Lady Battersley said to Gladstone, "Won't you write in my book?" And he did. And what do you suppose he wrote? -- without any hesitation, immediately he wrote in his own hand the 8th verse of the 17th Psalm:

"Keep me as the apple of thine eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

It's not among the most popular of the Psalms. I have been living with it very much for the last week. You will be shocked by it, your first reaction may be

that it makes a mockery of midesty. To the man who wrote that Psalm, saying to God "Listen to me, God, I'm a good man!" -- to all intents and purposes that's what he's saying....."I am a good man, I try to be good. In fact, God, I have been so good that if you were to search me, even in the darkness when nobody is around, and when I'm inclined to think thoughts that may not be right -- go ahead, God, try me, and you will be pleased with what you discover!" . . . imagine a person being so intent on doing the right thing that he is permitting himself to believe that day in and day out he would not waver from his convictions. Gladstone was the kind of person who allowed himself to believe that if he was inclined to do a single thing that would not be pleasing in God's sight, he'd have done with it at once. Can you imagine someone with that integrity? Well, you get that kind of integrity only when you want to be that kind of person. And only when you were fully aware of the fact that Gd has His sheltering wing over you, protecting you:

"Keep me as the apple of thine eye"

is a fascinating expression. What is the apple of your eye?

The apple of one's eye is that part of the eye in which the reflection of the other person is kept. It's also referred to as the pupil of the eye, when you look through the pupil you can look straight through to the optic nerve into the brain, as though you are going into the innermost part of the other person....and your reflection, your image, becomes part of that person. So this man William Gladstone, wanted to be kept inside God -- that close to God! He wanted to identify with God that earnestly, so completely. Doesn't that mean anything to you? Don't you get a measure of encouragement from the fact that there has been a person who once lived, and not a preacher at that! -- who gave himself so earnestly to trying to practice what he preached, and to behave according to what he believed. Every now and then God raises up someone like that, to become our encouragement. It is possible. It does happen.

He was ten years of age when Queen Victoria was born. A half-century later he became Prime Minister, the greatest honor that can fall to the lot of any Englishman. But remember Gladstone for more than this, much more. Think of him as the fortunate one of whom his mother could write, to tell to a friend of hers with unspeakable thankfulness, that her boy had been truly converted to God -- a boy, mark you, ten years of age....

....now if you think that's impressive, listen to this: in his monumental "Life of Gladstone," his biographer, Lord Morley, wrote as he gives us "a sentence from the diaries that Gladstone kept." It was written when he was barely twenty-one years of age . . .

" . . . in practice the great thing is that the life of
God may become the habit of my soul . . . "

And if you think that a marvelous thing, here's something even more grand: he lived for nearly 70 years after that, and remained faithful, unswerving, to that youthful conviction.

The Bishop of St. drew's was his confidante and was with him as he was nearing death. The shop kept his own diary, and he said as he walked away, "It's as though I had been on the Mount of Transfiguration and had been ushered into the very presence of God . . ." - - writing not about a preacher, but a politician...a statesman...a Prime Minister - - whose earnest desire was that he might be kept as the apple of God's eye and sheltered under His wing.

It was a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church who said of Gladstone,

"He wasn't a clergyman. I am.

He was as fit for the cloth as I am unfit."

He didn't always succeed. But he was faithful.

We don't have to succeed. Bt we are judged by our faithfulness.

This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS:
JOSEPHINE BUTLER" (Luke 7:37)

If you will permit, a very personal word at this moment.

My gratitude is very great for the warmth of the words spoken by the person during the announcement period. He knows my heart as does none other pastor.

My gratitude is very great for all those who stood here before me, interpreting God's precious truth. I was privileged to know two of my three predecessors. One of them, the first pastor, was a year or two ahead of me in theological seminary, and my immediate predecessor was a year behind me.

I'm also grateful for those who taught me to love the Good Book, for those who taught me in Sunday School. I'm grateful for the pastor that I had in my life-- I had only one. He baptized me, he confirmed me, he stood with me when I was named as a Minister of Word and Sacrament of the Lutheran Church. My heart is grateful.

And you should know that in my personal devotions this morning, both at home and at a very early hour in the Chapel of The Gateful Heart, I thanked God for having made me a minister, and I thanked Him for the privilege He gave me to serve in Pennsylvania and then to serve here. And I hope you won't mind, in my prayer to God, as I thanked Him I also asked Him if I could stay on a little bit longer.

* * * * *

And now the text, the 37th verse of the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke.

"And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner . . . "

No matter how you may wish or not wish to say it, usually, if not invariably, it comes out the same way -- there are two kinds of people -- good, and bad.

--- there are two kinds of men -- good, and bad....

--- there are two kinds of women -- good, and bad....

Now this morning I want to talk with you about women -- both kinds of women -- good, and bad, and to talk with you about them from the Christian perspective.

First, I want to talk to you about a bad one. You may relax a bit, I shan't be specific, as you may at first blush be inclined to think that I will. I shall paint in broad lines -- you can handle the details as you deem necessary.

How about this bad woman -- where did I learn about her? What can I tell you about her? Where is she written up?

Well, she's written up in the Bible. We don't know too much about her, fortunately, and I say fortunately because one ought never to concern himself with the sordid details of the evil that has made people bad. It's enough that we should know that they're bad.

....I don't know where she practiced the world's oldest profession, and I don't know all of the details. I don't know how she got trapped. I don't know whether she enjoyed it, or whether she detested it. I don't know what most people thought about her....I know she was branded, I know she was a woman with a reputation -- she was a bad woman, written up in the Bible.

The Scripture account of her makes it quite obvious. Everyone, most anyone, that is, would have recognized her for what she was -- either her looks, her speech, her manner of dress, or lack of it -- betrayed her. Her reputation had preceded her. To top it all off, she was a party-crasher. That, too, must be said about her. According to the Scriptural account, she wasn't on the guest list, but she showed up just the same.

Now, let me narrate for you that Bible passage -- I'll read it for you eventually, but let me give you the picture: Jesus was invited as a dinner guest. Now, it's important that you should know that on this occasion He was invited. Sometimes He invited Himself. You'll remember readily that incident in Jericho when He looked up and saw a man up a tree, and He said, "Zacchaeus, you come on down because I'm going to your house and I'm going to have supper with you."....and off they went. But this time Jesus was invited.

He was invited by a man of some reputation, I suppose, so much so that we even know his name, it was Simon. Now why he invited Him I can't tell you exactly. It may have been because he had a habit of asking people to dinner who were recognized in the community with some standing, and Jesus had that. He was a traveling guru, He was a teacher, He was a prophet. And Simon perhaps knew a measure of satisfaction in being able to add Him to his guest list -- "Why, there was that man from Nazareth, well-known prophet, when he came to my town I had him for dinner...." Or he may have been tremendously interested in Jesus and what He had to say. Maybe he wanted to learn first-hand as they sat at conversation. I'm not really certain, nor, I dare say, can you be certain. At any rate, Simon had Him for dinner.

Now, you ought to know the kind of setting in which they found themselves - - vastly different from the kind of meal you're going to have today, and the environment in which you'll find yourself.

For those of us who have had the good fortune to travel in the Mid-East or even in India -- sometimes you will find in India semblances of Bible life today which was much like Bible life in the time of Jesus. There are two strata in society -- the very rich and the very poor - - the distinguished and the disadvantaged.

Now, you can suppose that in Simon's case he was fortunate enough to have a house. And if you were fortunate to have a house, you probably had a court-yard, and in the area directly in front of the house was this open space where, in all likelihood, there was a garden of sorts and also a fountain. And when the weather was conducive, people ate in the outside area - which was available to people walking down the street -- the have-nots -- to find themselves naturally gravitating toward those who were having a meal. People who had sometimes knew a measure of satisfaction in vaunting in front of people that they had - what they didn't have. And they didn't much mind when they came in and ate, as the Scriptures have it, "the crumbs that fell from the master's table."

And also, very easily, when people were walking by, if they saw who the guest was, and they recognized him as a distinguished teacher, they'd just walk in, and stand around, while others ate....and they'd listen, because that's how they became enlightened, that's how they learned. They didn't have the media that you and I have today - - no newspaper, no radio, no television. And so it was an interesting thing for them to be able to catch up some pearls of wisdom from this teacher who came to their town. Now can you understand how it's the easiest thing in the world for this woman, this bad woman, this woman from the streets, to find herself as a party-crasher, so to speak.

Now when she got there, she immediately went to Jesus Christ and behaved in a very unlikely manner. She lost control of her emotions. At the very sight of Jesus she began to cry and to shed copiously her tears, so much so that the Bible said, "She wet the feet of Jesus with her tears".....and then she allowed the long tresses of her hair to become like a napkin or an apron, and she began to dry the feet of Jesus.

Now let me pause at this moment to tell you that if you were a guest in an Oriental home, there were three things that ought to take place, according to the book of etiquette in that day. One, you would be received by the host, who would greet

you warmly, place his hand upon your shoulder, and give you the kiss of peace. I stem from Mid-East stock, as some of you may know, and I can remember how this kind of thing would happen in my home when my father would greet a guest....

...the second thing, your sandals would be removed, either by the host or by his servant, and then water would be poured upon one's feet, to cleanse them from the grime, the dust and the dirt of the dusty road that you took to get to the place....there were no paved streets, as you know.....

...and the third thing, a part of custom when you were a guest in the home, they sprinkled some sweet-smelling something -- perfume, attar of roses, you name it -- on the head or the forehead of the guest. All of those things would take place.

You've got to remember that now because of the way this woman from the streets behaved in an unseemly manner. When she saw Jesus she began to cry. She washed His feet, not with water, but with tears, and she had around her neck a vial of perfume

...it's not too much to suggest that maybe one of her better customers gave it to her. She ripped it loose, poured the contents upon the feet of Jesus, which she had kissed.....

...and all the while this was happening, poor old Simon-the-host was squirming, he couldn't quite make out what was going on, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. And Scripture has it that he said to himself, "Why, this man, he isn't as smart as I thought he was, maybe he isn't a prophet. His kind ought to know what kind she is! And if he did, he'd control the situation. He wouldn't let it go on!" And Jesus, sensing all of this, of course, takes Simon-his-host to task.

Well, now that I've told you about it, let me read it for you from Scripture the way it appears. I prize, of course, the Bible that I read it as a youngster, the King James, but J. B. Phillips translation is a bit more real. Let me read it for you according to Phillips. Remember now, it's the 7th chapter of Luke, verses 37 to 50.....

"Then one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to a meal with him. When Jesus came into the house, he took his place at the table and a woman, known in the town as a bad woman, found out that Jesus was there and brought an alabaster flask of perfume and stood behind him crying, letting her tears fall on his feet and then drying them with her hair. Then she kissed them and anointed them with the perfume. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were really a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of a person is touching him. He would have realised that she is a bad woman.' Then Jesus spoke to him,

'Simon, there is something I want to say to you.'

'Very well, Master,' he returned, 'say it.'

'Once upon a time, there were two men in debt to the same money-lender. One owed him fifty pounds and the other five. And since they were unable to pay, he generously cancelled both of their debts. Now, which one of them do you suppose will love him more?'

'Well,' returned Simon, 'I suppose it will be the one who has been more generously treated.'

'Exactly,' replied Jesus, and then turning to the woman, he said to Simon,

'You can see this woman? I came into your house but you provided no water to wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. There was no warmth in your greeting, but she, from the moment I came in, has not stopped covering my feet with kisses. You gave me no oil for my head, but she has put perfume on my feet. That is why I tell you, Simon, that her sins, many as they are, are forgiven; for she has shown me so much love. But the man who has little to be forgiven has only a little love to give.'

Then he said to her,

'Your sins are forgiven.'

And the men at table with him began to say to themselves,

'And who is this man, who even forgives sins?'

But Jesus said to the woman,

'It is your faith that has saved you. Go in peace.' . . . "

I told you I wanted to talk about women, and two kinds of women. That's the bad one, written up in the Bible.

Now before I talk about the good woman in this sermon, we need to deal with this: How was it that she came to do this kind of thing for Jesus? A good question. I'm willing to suggest to you that she heard about Jesus before. I'm willing to suggest to you that she had seen Jesus before. Where and how I don't know, any more than you do. But I don't think this thing happened just like that. Some time prior to this there had been an encounter....and I'm willing to believe with all my soul, that when Jesus looked at her, and when He spoke to her, something happened in her life. Hear me and hear me well, let some people speak to me, and it draws out the better side of my nature....and then there are some people, when they speak to me, it draws out the worst side of my nature. People can have that effect upon us.... Jesus had this kind of effect upon her -- He brought out the better side of her nature.

Others had spoken to her, others had looked on her, and brought out the worst side of her nature. Once she had been encountered by Jesus Christ, she could never again be satisfied with the kind of life she was living. Some of us can attest to the very same truth -- we have encountered people who have made a difference in our lives, who have constantly brought out the better part of us.

What kind of effect do you have on people? Good question, honestly. Still as

of old, you and I become according to the way either people love us, or refuse to love us.

At 8:30 this morning, that precious band of high school youngsters who sang in the choir began their anthem something like this: "What kind of a man are you, Jesus?" - - - this is the kind of person He was, who looked for that, as our Quaker friends say, who look for that which is of God in every person.

I have told you this before, and in all likelihood I'll go on saying again and ever so often from time to time - - every saint has his past; and every sinner has his future. . . . and once Jesus Christ had spoken to her, she walked out into a brand new and different and wonderful world!

....I wish I could tell you that she never again succumbed. I can't tell you that. She may have fallen as soon as somebody else flashed a hundred-dollar bill in front of her - - I don't know....

But with all my soul I do believe that she never again really wanted to be the same. As the words remain ringing in her ears - - "Go - - your sins which are many, are forgiven."

Now I told you, about two kinds of women.

The good woman, where did I read about her? Surprisingly enough in this case, not in the Bible.....She has about six lines in the Encyclopedia Britannica. I read about her in a chapter in another book. Her name was Josephine Butler.

...now you won't forget, of course, this is another in the series of sermons on "Favorite Texts of Famous Persons.".....

Josephine Butler was an 18th Century social reformer in gland, of whom many a person had said, "Her life transformed all the people who ever met her" . . . and a free translation would be, her lengthened shadow was cast benignly in many directions.

You need to know several things about her:

One - - she must have been an adorable person, who was a delight to know. She lived in the country area, somewhat removed from the city. She lived a rather sheltered life, but a good life. And she paid her parents a beautiful tribute: "What I learned about goodness I learned from my parents, by living with them." At a certain period in her life she suffered a spiritual depression, for an entire 12-month period, trying to figure out what God is really like, and what kind of a relationship she ought to have with God. It was extremely difficult for her. And then one day she came across this passage of Scripture, in which she discovered that just by allowing yourself to be encountered by Jesus Christ, you could walk out into a brand new

world. And that was the moment of enlightenment. That's one thing you need to know about her, for this period of depression for a whole year, when she had this soul struggle, and then was encountered by the Christ in this passage of Scripture, who opened a new world for her.

The next thing you need to know is, that about this same time -- and listen to this very carefully, her only child, the apple of her eye, fell from the bannister, damaged her skull, and in a matter of days, died. Not long after that, as she sat by her window, meditating, deep in grief, she heard the bitter anguished cry of a woman in her own back yard....it was a young woman who had run away from a traveling circus, who was involved in acrobatics....

....and the only innocent part of her life was when she
was performing her acrobatics.....

She didn't want that kind of life, and she ran away, and the circus people pursued her, even to her own back yard . . . and as Josephine Butler heard the cry of this woman - - crying, as much as to say, "I don't want to go back! I don't want to go back!" - - - Josephine Butler, for 30 years from that moment on, having suffered the loss of her own daughter, gave her life to mothering the daughters of other women who had fallen. She ministered to the flotsam and the jetsom of womanhood.

Two kinds of women. How will the bad ever become good, if there aren't people who look for the good in bad people? - - who keep saying to them: "There's another way! You don't have to go to Hell!"

But how will some people find the way to Heaven unless people possessed by the Spirit of Christ touch them, speak to them, pay attention to them . . . ?

....this I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS: ALLEN GARDINER"
(Psalm 51:10)

O GOD, We spend so little time in
doing this sort of thing, in giving
some measure of undivided attention
to studying of Your Word. That we
may do it the better, cleanse us now
from sin, make us fit to think Your
thoughts; in the name of Jesus
Christ, Who when He came, came
preaching. Amen.

Let me read now as carefully as I can what I hope you will listen to as earnestly as you should, the beginning sentences for this sermon:

Today's sermon is another in the general series dealing with the specific Bible passages that dominated or motivated certain people in particular. You will please notice at once the definite relationship between Scriptural truth and individual lives. The general series is entitled: "Favorite Texts of Famous Persons" --- the definite relationship between Scriptural truth and individuals.

Now this statement is simply to suggest that no study of Scripture in the Christian perspective is an end in itself. Mark it well and say it often, we dare not become fascinated by a particular method or technique when it comes to the study of Scriptures, so that the method obviates the message. By the same token, we need to say to one another that no matter how much we may master the contents of the Scriptures, unless the material covered masters us, we may have studied in vain.

Or let me put it for you in still another way, paraphrasing Luther a bit:

"Lest the Christ of Scriptures become the Lord of
my life, I have little or no advantage over the
person who has never studied the Bible."

Today's text that commands our attention is really from one of the best-known Psalms which we will be studying as best we can with some detail tomorrow during the Bible Study sessions. In a certain sense, it could be designated as every-man's text, since it readily applies to all of us, each of us. Let me read it for you now, the tenth verse of Psalm 51:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God."

Now don't forget, we'll come back to it shortly.

Now, quite parenthetically, let me ask you a question: Have you looked at an eleven-year old youngster lately, have you come upon an eleven-year-old youngster quietly, unannounced, to find the person sitting and doing nothing but just thinking? It's hard to tell what's going through the mind of an eleven-year-old youngster.

I've re-lived such experiences in my own life as the father of our two boys and the grandfather of two other boys -- an eleven-year-old sitting and thinking. It does happen. And you can't always tell what's going through their minds.

In the case of Allen Gardner, whose favorite text we're going to deal with today, there was no question what was going through his mind. He had a hero, and he was thinking of his hero. His hero was a man of the sea, the famous man of the sea, Lord Nelson, no less, the great chap of Trafalgar.

There was something in Allen Gardner's veins that made him want to go to sea. He was eleven when the great victory over Napoleon guaranteed the deliverance of England. Three years later -- I have every reason to believe the wheels were working in the mind of an eleven-year-old -- three years later he enlisted in the navy, and off he went. Little did he realize that when he enlisted in the navy -- in those days, he was signing up for a school of immorality. Anything and everything that shouldn't happen, morally speaking, was on his agenda.

He had been away at sea for a year. And then he got -- we used to get them -- some of us remember them -- a letter edged in black, announcing the death of someone. He got that letter edged in black, bringing the news that his mother had died. He experienced trauma in this regard, he was shocked. He re-lived the day he left home, in a fit of impatience. He happened to think of her influence upon his life and what he had known as a youngster back home. And then it occurred to him -- she was dead! ...and something terrible happened -- he cut lose from all that she had taught him, and for ten years he lived a wicked life. You name it -- he'd tasted it! and he wasn't about to turn his back on it. He writes regretfully the kind of life he had lived for a decade.

And then something happened. He got two more letters, one letter from his father. It was a letter of rebuke, reproach. His father had learned of the kind of life he was living and he simply puts it on the line, "I can't believe that you have become this kind of person -- what! -- is this the youngster with whom I walked, and

scaled the hill behind our house? Is this the lad with whom I prayed when together we went to the altar of the Lord? Is this the lad with whom I prayed when we had table grace and table prayers at our home? Is this the kind of person you've become? . . . " - - and he laid it on the line, rebuking his son and re-proving him for the evil and the error of his ways.

Now he got another letter, and this letter was from a friend of his mother's, an intimate associate. And she, too, had learned what had happened to him, and she wrote. She wrote wisely, she wrote winsomely. She gave him to understand he wasn't meant to be that kind of person, she gave him to understand that he did not stem from that kind of stock. And then, would you believe it, she went on to preach to him, she quoted Scripture. She introduced him to this Psalm, Psalm No. 51, which is the Psalm of the penitent. There is no Psalm of all the penitential Psalms that strikes to the depth as this one does.

....then she zeroed in for all that she was worth and she said,
"Your heart is not pure, Allen, you need a clean heart. And only
God can give you a clean heart....verse 10, Psalm 51:

'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a
right spirit within me.' . . . "

By this time you ought to be aware of the fact that we use these words every time we come together here in Saint Luke. You will be singing them before the service is concluded. For shame upon you if those words come so easily to your lips, and thoughtlessly so. The lady who wrote that letter told Allen, "You either have a clean heart, or you don't have a clean heart."

Now, let's stop at that point for a moment. I'm fully aware of the fact that this is a line of thinking that some people don't care to hear. They shy away from any study of Scriptures that forces them to recognize that the Bible doesn't much deal with gray zones. We may. But the Bible doesn't. For whatever may be the reason, if only to jolt us into reality, the Bible is always drawing the line:

-- Heaven . . . Hell. There is no justification for the teaching
of Purgatory in the Scriptures.

Heaven . . . Hell. The line is drawn.

According to the Scriptures -- don't quarrel with me -- it's Scriptural truth:

-- saved . . . unsaved. A line is drawn, according to the Scriptures.

-- a pure heart . . . or an impure heart: the line is drawn.

And that dear old lady had to tell Allen Gardner that, the boy that went off to sea, and lived a wicked life..."Allen, your heart isn't clean - - it is impure...no matter

how insignificant it may occur to you that a speck of dust or dirt may be, once it appears you don't have a completely clean situation. It is no longer completely clean." . . . so she wrote Allen Gardner.

Now, I need to say this to you as carefully as I can: God be praised, she spoke the truth, winsomely, and in love. Some people can speak the truth, but they cannot speak it winsomely. It's an awesome thing to be able to speak the truth in love.

...some people speak it so harshly that you're alienated from the message . . . some people shy away from speaking the truth as profoundly as it could be spoken, and then sugar-coat it and make it so soft that the truth itself then doesn't make its impact....

But this little old lady kept speaking the truth -- forcefully, and with love. And she got her point across.

Allen Gardner began to think. He couldn't think how long it was since he had read the Bible....and he didn't have a Bible. Now let me tell you how difficult it is for some people to get back on the straight and narrow path.

...he wanted a Bible. The only place to get a Bible was to go to the book store and buy one. And he stood outside the book store embarrassed to go in and buy a Bible - - he wasn't that kind of a person - - he hadn't been that kind of a person.

...and he waited until one customer went in, another customer came out, until the store was empty of customers...

...and he went in very quickly for a Bible -- grabbed it, left. And then spent an hour, according to his own admission, before he read it, wondering what the man thought of his buying a Bible . . .

That's how far he had gotten away!

Has anything that you've ever written in a letter spelled out the difference between life and death, spiritually speaking, to another person? David Thoreau used to shake preachers up by asking the question: "Did you preachers ever really say anything that made a difference?" I shudder sometimes when I walk away from this sacred desk lest, for some of you, I didn't say anything.

Marcella Steesy, who is here, remembers this very well because she knew Edna Cassady. Edna was married to Mike, who was quite a character, and you need to hear this - we're a family. Mike never got around to joining the church. He was about 80 years of age when he decided that maybe it was the thing to do. It wasn't that he didn't practice some kind of commitment to his faith, but he never publicly

stood up and declared it. I'm sure Edna had badgered him across the years, and bless his soul, out of respect for her, he wanted to make arrangements to be baptized and confirmed. So he wrote me a letter, and in that letter he said, "This is my decision, and I'd like to surprise Edna, so don't you call me on the phone, because she always listens in on the conversation - - don't you call me on the phone. But be careful what you say, let me know that you got my letter, and then we'll set up a time when I can come to see you." . . .

- - now get this, when Mike got the letter, and I did what I could to veil what he wanted to hear . . . he came to me and he said with a great deal of appreciation, "Pastor, I got your letter - and you didn't say a thing!"

I wish I could have taken Mike Cassidy to our theological seminary at Gettysburg and asked him to speak to those neophyte preachers, to make certain that when you're given the chance to communicate the Gospel you do say something.

That woman who wrote Allen Gardner did say something, and she said it well! There's no question about it. And I want you to know, with whatever years God gives me, for which I am profoundly grateful, I hope that what I say from this sacred desk and what I may be able to say to you, no matter where you may find me, I may be faithful to the Gospel....

"Create in me a clean heart, O God -- only you can make me clean."

You and I have a way of asking God for many things. Most of the things for which we ask God really aren't that important, honestly now. Said the little old lady who wrote Allen Gardner, "In the time of death, Allen, you either are, or you aren't."

Augustine, the great Church Father, used to pray, "Save me, O God, but not tonight!" That's the way it is with many of us. We want a clean heart - - but not that clean, at least not right now.

One of my favorite Psalms remains: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my way. And if there be any evil way in me, lead me in the way everlasting . . . " Only God can do it . . . only God can do it.

...how much do you want it done?

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS:
LEO TOLSTOY" (Matthew 6:33)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

First, let me read you the passage of Scripture upon which this sermon is based -- the words of Jesus Christ, recorded as a part of the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew,

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your
life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink,
nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is life
not more than food and the body more than clothing?

Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor
gather into barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds
them. Are you not of more value than they? And which
of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span
of life?

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the
lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spin, yet
I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not ar-
rayed like one of these!

But if God so clothes the grass of the field which
today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven.
will He not much more clothe you, O men of little
faith?

Therefore do not be anxious, saying what shall we eat,
or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For
the Gentiles seek all these things, and your Heavenly
Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his
Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things
shall be yours as well."

Everything that you're going to hear as far as this morning's sermon is concerned, is inspired by this particular passage of Scripture.

I'm absolutely convinced that there are two kinds of people -- we're always doing this sort of thing, dividing people into two categories:

- those who take the teachings of Jesus Christ very,
very seriously;
- and those who upon hearing them, do not take them
seriously enough.

There was a person to took this passage of Scripture with the utmost of seriousness, and it changed his life - - so much so that he became the greatest novelist, some people say, of all time! And undoubtedly Leo Tolstoy has written one of the two or three greatest novels in all of the literature of the world. Leo Tolstoy took that verse of Scripture seriously.

Now in about 18 minutes this sermon is going to conclude. Let me tell you how it's going to conclude right now. I'm going to read for you, very carefully and earnestly, about something that Leo Tolstoy wrote. He has a powerful tale of a young Russian who fell heir to his father's small farm. He was no sooner in possession of this land until he began to dream eagerly of how he could add to it. One morning a stranger, evidently a person of power and authority, came to him and told him, as they were standing near the old homestead, that he could have, for nothing, all the land that he could walk over in one day . . . but at sun-down he must be back at the very place from which he started. Pointing to the grave of the young man's father, the stranger said, "This is the point to which you must return."

The youth, looking eagerly over the rich fields in the distance, threw off his coat, and without waiting to say a word to his wife and children, started off across the fields . . .

-- his first plan was to cover a tract of ground six miles square, but when he had walked the sixth, he decided to make it nine, and then twelve . . . and then fifteen -- which would give him sixty miles to walk before sun-down . . .

-- by noon he had covered two sides of the square, or 30 miles. But eager to get on and compass the whole distance, he did not stop for food . . . an hour later he saw an old man drinking at a spring, but in his thirst for the land, he pushed aside the cup which the old man offered to him, and rushed on in his eager quest for the land . . .

...when he was a few miles from the goal he was worn down with fatigue. A few hundred yards from the line he saw the sun approaching the horizon, and knew that he had but a few minutes left. Hurrying on and ready to faint, he summoned all of his energies for his last effort and managed to stagger across the line just as the sun was sinking . . . but as he crossed the line he saw a cruel, cynical smile on the face of the stranger who had promised him the land. The man, the stranger, was waiting for him with that cruel cynical smile upon his face, as he stood by the father's grave. Just as he crossed the line, the master and possessor, he thought, of fifteen square miles of rich land, the youth fell dead upon the ground which he had coveted.

The stranger then said to the servants, "I offered him all the land that he could cover -- now you see what that is! -- six feet long by two feet wide -- and I thought he would like to have the land close to his father's grave rather than to have it anywhere else." . . . and with that the stranger, who was Death, vanished . . . saying as he did so, "I've kept my pledge."

It takes a bit of doing to write like that. Something must have gripped a man's soul to be able to be as perceptive of life as all that. Some transformation must have taken place, so that a person could read life in those terms. And that's exactly what had happened. Leo Tolstoy was not always that perceptive. He was born into a rather comfortable estate. But very early in life he became a seeking, searching soul. Very early in life he began to think deeply.

Now I need to tell you this, but not all people think, and not all people think deeply. The year in which I was ordained as a pastor of the United Lutheran Church in America the Chief Pastor and Bishop of our souls at that time, Dr. Frederick Knubel, sharp mind, dry wit, used to say -- "Take time to think -- you have little competition."

Of all those who take time to think, few really think deeply. Tolstoy was one of the few who thought deeply. His whole life, it can be said, was involved in the thinking, searching process. He took nothing for granted. He painstakingly examined all that the philosopher proposed . . . who was it who wrote of him -- "In his daring search he knocked at the door of Heaven and rattled at the very gates of Hell. He scaled the heights and sounded the depths -- nothing was too exalted, and nothing was too depraved for his inquiring mind. It was the story of his life. Happily, the search led him to the Scriptures, and there he found the only satisfying answer to his big question: What is the aim of human life? Why do I live?

Tolstoy crystalized his thinking and put it into these words:

"The personal good of the individual man, or even of the family or of the state, cannot be the ultimate aim of life. The meaning of human life does not consist in each man's acquiring his personal and short-lived good at the expense of another. The meaning of your life can only be the fulfillment of His will who, for the attainment of His ends, has sent you into this life"

You need to know this about Tolstoy, the man in whose soul the Scripture became alive. He wrote a number of things. He also wrote his CONFESSIONS -- a confession that was good for his soul and for ours. Said he, "I remember that in my 12th year a boy -- by now long since dead, a pupil in the Gymnasium, spent a Sunday with us

and brought us the news of the last discovery in the Gymnasium -- namely, that there was no God and that all that we were taught on that subject was a pure invention. How interested we were! We all eagerly accept the theory as something particularly attractive, and possibly quite true." . . . So Tolstoy lost God, if one may use that figure of speech. But those who knew Tolstoy said the loss was not very great, for up until that time he said he believed in God - - which was simply his way of saying "I would not deny the existence of God." But in what God he so languidly believed, Tolstoy could not have said. And so for years he drifted - - much as a ship without a compass, without a chart.

I am reluctant to tell you this, but you need to hear it....

- - He did live a despicable life for a certain period, in his eagerness to find what life is all about. Hear Tolstoy now on Tolstoy:

" . . . I cannot recall these years

(referring now to those years when he was drifting, living without a commitment to God)

. . . I cannot recall these years without horror and disgust - - I killed men in war

- - I challenged others to duels in order to kill them

- - I squandered money at cards

- - I ill-treated my parents

- - I rioted with loose women, I deceived men

- - lying...robbery....adultery...fornication, drunkenness....violence....murder - - - there was no crime that I left uncommitted - -

And yet I was considered by my equals as a comparatively moral person "

It wasn't until he was 50 years of age -- married for some fifteen years, with 13 children in that period of time, that in all of his searching he was gripped by the passage of Scripture that was read a short while ago, and that one verse in particular - - "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

It is absolutely amazing what happens when somebody takes Jesus Christ seriously. For shame upon Tolstoy, one may say, that roughly speaking, two-thirds of his life should have been spent, with only a third of his years remaining by which to live according to this conviction....that one should put off so long being

gripped by what is fundamentally true!

You know that I have spent my life and my energy ever since God made me a pastor, interpreting God's Word. And while I try to remain a keen student of the human scene, for the life of me I can't understand why people are so slow in accepting the fundamental truths of God, because life itself has a way of driving us to our knees - - life itself has a way of proving the integrity of Scriptural truth. At 50 years of age Tolstoy found it, and his life was never again the same. What he believed now is being reflected in what he wrote. He became completely didactic and moral in all that he wrote. He subscribed tenaciously to the doctrine that love is the way to live. It needs to be said, he lost faith in governments, he lost faith in institutions. For him the only hope for the world was in a transformed individual. He believed the destiny was in the hands of those who came to grips with what God had proclaimed - - - and in their own individual way applied these truths -- where they lived, in the lives they touched.

He renounced personal property. He had little patience with the institutional church, he said it had failed him. He also allowed himself to believe that he should live a simple life. He made his own boots, his own shoes, tilled his own garden, grew his own food . . . even wore the clothing, in the latter years of his life, of a peasant. For it was the peasant whose fervent faith had made real to him the precious truths of Jesus Christ.

You need to know the whole story. He almost drove his wife mad, of course, allowing her to worry about things that were so important for bringing up the children, and caring for all the mundane things that had to be dealt with. In the latter part of his life he gathered enough courage to say, "I'm going to live this life as Jesus announced with complete abandon . . . and he convinced one of his daughters to go with him, and also his personal physician. And the three of them went off, hopelessly to live completely and earnestly according to the admonition, the directive of Jesus Christ. Within three days he was stricken with pneumonia and died at an out-of-way rail station somewhere in Russia. But his legacy remains -- pricking the conscience of every single one of us.

Oh, his wife was smart. She arranged for the copyrights in the latter part of his writing period to be signed over to her, knowing the kind of person he was going to become, so that she might be protected. But to all intents and purposes, everybody pays the price in order that somebody else might live wholeheartedly according to the convictions of Jesus Christ . . . and to all intents and purposes everybody pays the price when someone doesn't take Jesus Christ seriously.

We all pay a price when there are those who want to move in the direction of Heaven . . . and we all pay a price when there are those who move in the direction of Hell. Bluntly put, you pay your money, you take your choices! -- you either say "Bravo!" to a person like Tolstoy, whose lengthened shadow is cast benignly upon every single one of us, pricking our minds to the day we die - - -

-- How much land does a person really need?

Tolstoy's immortal story is simply saying it again and ever so often -- there are no pockets in a shroud.

Interesting, isn't it? - - Saint Luke pilgrims go half-a-world-away just to walk in the footsteps of a penniless preacher, whose words are echoed from this pulpit Sunday after Sunday after Sunday.

Fifty years of age . . . Tolstoy saw the light

Fifty years of age, the light that he had seen -- outside the church!

-- that's threatening, it's intimidating, it's uncomfortable...

Why do we grab? . . . why do we shove? . . . why do we push on for only one thing?

-- to accumulate, to take pride in what we can grab! -- and tuck away!

That Penniless Preacher one day said, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee -- then whose will these things be?"

....Jesus said it first. Tolstoy picked it up.

Some of us can never again be the same, once we've read his echo of the words of Jesus Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS: GEORGE FOX"
(John 8: 12)

BY THE influence of the Holy Spirit,
O Gd, quiet our minds, hush our
hearts, make us fit to think Your
thoughts; in the Name of Jesus Christ,
Who when He came, came preaching.
Amen.

First, the text, the 12th verse of the 8th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"...Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of
the world. Who follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life...."

Anyone who says anything or does something can anticipate two possible reactions:

-- either people will pay attention, or they will not pay attention.

And of those who pay attention, there are two possible categories that cannot be ignored:

-- let a person say something, let a person do something, and when people pay attention, they will either agree, or they will differ....they will either support, or they may defy.

Having said that, let's go back to this text. It's an interesting chapter in the life of our Blessed Lord. Why He ever allowed Himself to be found in the situation I'm about to describe for you, for the life of me I can't quite tell.

He said something. He said something absolutely sublime, and with His whole heart, and with full confidence He said what He said. He spoke as no one else had ever spoken, and He spoke for their edification and for their encouragement. But having said what He did, there were those who differed with Him violently, and eventually they became a shouting, shoving match. The net result was: He had to dodge the stones that were hurled at Him, He had to conceal Himself from their sight, and to find an escape route from the very House of God.

Very earnestly He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever walks by me and follows me, he won't walk in darkness -- he will walk in the light, the light of life." . . . and then a bunch of Pharisees came, among other people...

...they called Him a liar, they put Him on the defensive....

Why He ever allowed Himself to have that happen I don't quite know -- because eventually, as you read this chapter . . .

...I've been living with it -- very earnestly, every single day of this week, particularly in anticipation of standing among you now . . . because you have to say, as you read the last verse of the chapter, it was apparently a no-win situation -- He didn't convince them....

He had spoken the truth, they went their way, still wondering why they couldn't kill Him. He went His way, smarting, presumably, at their remarks. But thank God that He was able to dodge the stones, and live to preach and teach another day. "I am the light of the world," He said...."Take me at my word -- prove me! Test me! Find out for yourself! Walk according to the truth that I've shared with you -- be to other people as I have been to you."

There are many ways of giving people the benediction. Occasionally here in Saint Luke Church, and particularly on Wednesdays when we celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar at mid-day. We may say to our people -- "Go now -- walk in love and truth, so that no matter where you may be found, love and truth will be there." Try it! Test it!

Now going back to Jesus. Why did you argue with them, Jesus? Why did you allow them to put you on the defensive? It was a no-win situation then. From my human perspective I think I have the answer -- that we might benefit from what He had to experience, that we might learn that the truth of His words stands on their own. And we are in duty bound to respond to light as it's being shed our way.

Interestingly enough, these very same words that turned those people off, and repelled them, were the words that drew the man of whom I am about to speak to Jesus Christ. Some people have a way of responding to the light. Some people have a way of shying away from it, defying it, ignoring it. Some people seek the light, they want to know the truth....other people don't want to know the truth. There is something perverse about human nature in trying to put people on the defensive, and that's exactly what happened in the life of our Blessed Lord. Remember what I told you: some people are drawn by it . . . other people could be repelled by it.

You're not forgetting, are you, that this sermon is another in the series of "Favorite Texts of Famous Persons." And now I must talk to you about George Fox, the man who was drawn to Jesus Christ, and the precious truth of the Gospel, by -- of all the verses in the Bible, this one specifically, George Fox.

Let me be . . . or rather, you be charitable with me -- I'm about to hazard an

opinion that maybe some 85% of you are hearing about George Fox with some degree of emphasis today for the first time. But he is someone who ought not to be ignored. He made a tremendous contribution to religious and political life. Oh, we'll grant you he lived some 300 years ago. He was born in 1624, no one even knows for sure what day in July it was. At 18 years of age he was repairing shoes.....and then it occurred to him, that it was very far from a satisfying experience. He had a hunger down deep in his soul to know about God, and the truth of God. So one day he said, "That's it!" . . . and walked away from the cobbler's bench forever.

He threw himself at the mercy of other people. I'm not so sure that you would have responded very kindly to him -- he was very much the eccentric....

- - do you know where he bedded down at night?
 - like as not, in the hollow of an apple tree
- - in season, do you know what was usually his daily fare? - what he ate?
 - wild berries, and the fruits of a tree.

Not to be dependent upon people, clever chap that he was, remembering his days at the cobbler's bench, he said, "I'll make me a suit that will last!" - - and he was known as the Man-With-The-Leather-Breeches." - - He made a leather suit, and wore it year after year after year . . . and lived a very simple life.

He wandered around from place to place, he went to church. The very formal worship services of the church in his day did not speak to him. He listened to sermons: none spoke to him as my old professor in seminary used to say, - "Let every sermon speak to your edification" . . . no sermon built him up, no sermon inspired him.....

...he went to Cambridge

...he went to Oxford

...he talked with men preparing for the ministry, he engaged them in conversation, they made light of him....

. . . one so much as to say, "Go off and find yourself a woman, get married and forget about all this business" . . . another encouraged him to go back and take up his shoe-repairman's trade.

But George Fox honestly believed that a person was meant to have peace. He honestly believed that he could be at peace with other people, he could be at peace with God. Where would he find it?

Do I have to convince you that there are those of us who come to this sacred desk and struggle earnestly, and pray with fervor that when they stand among you,

their voice should be as no uncertain trumpet - - that any time anyone should come here there should be no misunderstanding at all regarding the nature of the God whom we love, and whom we're meant to serve - - no misunderstanding at all about the claim of Jesus Christ upon our souls. That was not true in George Fox's day, sad to relate. He had to go outside the established church to find his peace with God, in a way in which he could walk that would make him at peace with his fellow men.

He allowed himself this absolutely marvelous notion, with which some of us haven't dealt enough - - he allowed himself this marvelous notion: that God did not finish speaking when He wrote the last verse of the Book of the Revelation. He permitted himself to honestly believe that God goes on speaking, revealing Himself directly to anyone who looks for the light.

He kept a journal. He wasn't an intellectual - - people faulted him for that. He did not place a high value upon academic education, and yet significantly enough -- listen to this! -- here in the United States: Erlon College, Haverford, Swarthmore, Cornell, Bryn Mawr, John Hopkins - - were all founded either by groups of Quakers or by Quaker individuals. He honestly believed that if a person would just quiet his mind, without benefit of formal training, and hush his heart, get his soul to be stilled - - God would speak to him in the very same way that God spoke to people long, long ago.

And why not? Why should we allow ourselves to believe that God's lips were sealed and made silent when the last book in the Bible was written? Why should we allow ourselves to believe that God doesn't have anything to say to you and to me personally -- today -- as He did to Andrew, and Simon Peter, and Judas Iscariot, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Mary, and Martha . . . in days gone by? This is the way he wrote in his journal: he's talking, now, about what he was looking for: peace, peace of soul - - oneness with God, and a high regard for other people.

"These things I did not see by the help of man, nor by letter . . ."

(and there he is referring to the Scriptures,
I am sorry to say)

" . . . though they are written in the letter. But I saw them in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by His immediate spirit and powers, as did the holy men of God, by whom the Holy Scriptures were written. . . ."

Ask yourself what he's saying. He's saying, "As it happened then and there, in centuries gone by, it's happening now. And if I have to go outside the Church to find

it . . " Isn't that an unpleasant thought, isn't that an uncomfortable thought?

Do you realize how earnestly some of us commit ourselves to our calling? -- that no one should ever come to a place such as this and not be able to recognize the truth of God -- spoken in love and with conviction. But in the day of George Fox that wasn't happening, and he was pretty much on his own. God be praised, He's forever mindful of His own, and seeker after truth is never disappointed. And God did reveal Himself to George Fox.

George Fox founded the Society of Friends, he founded the Quakers. For 300 years they have had a marvelous influence in many parts of the world. And if you think all they did was sit and fold their hands and remain quiet, you are mistaken. They were the leaders in one social reform after another -- in England and in the United States.

You see, the trouble with those people who rejected Jesus Christ when He said, "I am the light of the world" was because they believed that they had to intellectualize what He was saying. Now don't get me wrong, I place a high value on the intellectual, and I firmly believe that what we preach and teach ought to be intelligible and respected by the intellectual. But you and I come into some difficulty when we simply settle in all too easily on intellectualizing.

...those people in Jesus' day were trying to intellectualize God, they were trying to intellectualize what God was saying when the lips of Jesus Christ were parted and certain words were spoken, and they couldn't quite figure it out, and it didn't make sense to them . . . and because it didn't make sense to them they did not accept it.....

...now don't you dare misunderstand me. Our Lord said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind . . " . . . and I hope and pray that whatever preaching is delivered from this desk will command your respect intellectually. But you don't stop at that point, and you don't come simply to be intellectually satisfied.....

I don't know that it will ever be possible for us, from an intellectual point of view, to ever perfectly and completely understand everything that God has said. At some risk I stand before you now! Any number of you might not be able to understand what I'm trying to say, wrestle as I may with my mind and with my heart and

with my soul before I even come to this sacred desk, lest anyone misunderstand, misinterpret. In the day of Jesus, the people who gave Jesus a rough time, and who threw stones at him, were deliberately defying Him because they could not intellectualize what He was saying.

Why do I make much of this? George Fox comes along and admits to himself that he can't possibly intellectualize it and completely understand it. But in the spirit of Kierkegaard, he says, "The ultimate is not to understand . . ."

-- that is to say, the most wonderful thing is not to be able to understand completely - -

" . . the ultimate is to act upon it."

And that's exactly what George Fox did. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" ...and he acted upon it. He took those words seriously and began to do something about it. He didn't much worry about how he could apprehend the full meaning of the words, but he did live the words, and prove them, in the crucible of life itself. And so he began walking in the light of the footsteps of Jesus Christ. He walked where Jesus walked. And what happened? The Quakers more than any people I know -- say it sublimely and practice it exceedingly well - - they look for that which is of God in every person. That's what it is to walk in the light of Jesus Christ. He sheds light on every human soul. Jesus Christ looks upon every single one of us as an object of His love. Jesus Christ looks upon every single one of us as a potential for good. George Fox acted upon that.

...I will be traveling with our Saint Luke band of pilgrims to the Holy Land this week -- I'll re-live so many of their steps. There is no place in all of God's earth to which I would sooner return again and often than the Holy Land...and I think out of the Holy Land comes the devout Arab concern for even the tiniest scrap of paper -- the devout Arab will not discard the tiniest scrap of paper because he says, no matter how small it may be, the name of God, the name of Allan, can still be written on it" . . . to see people through the lens of God, through the light of love, is to honestly believe that no person, no matter how insignificant, that person is still someone on whom the name of God is written....

-- thank our Quakers for that.

They didn't always understand George Fox. They threw him in jail at least eight times in twenty years. And it wasn't until England passed the Toleration Act

that they gave any kind of respect to his teachings and to his groups. George Fox and the Quakers, begins to see the light in your face, and in my face. He acts upon that, he looks for that which is of God in every person.

And the second thing the Quakers have done for us -- more than any other group, they value silence. Being made quiet, taking Scriptural truth at its words: "Be still and know that I am God." - - - "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near . . ." - - make the climate that provides the environment so God can be heard.

.....I think if necessity dictated it, I could be a Quaker, even though I love to sing and hear you sing . .

- - and I place a high value upon the kerygma, the proclamation of the Gospel, there's the time when God's Word has to be interpreted....

- - and music remains a very important ingredient in our worship experience, I don't have to tell you that, where I stand on that ground....when I went to my first parish, the very first staff member that I asked that the congregation consider retaining was a choirmaster and organist ...and when I came to you 28 years ago, the very first staff member that I asked this congregation to add was a choirmaster and an organist...

All these things I cherish, but I also know, with all the clamor and the confusion, and no matter how we may use other things to encourage you to think the thoughts of God, there comes the time when we must be made very, very quiet . . .

My debt is very great to my predecessors here at Saint Luke. Long before I came to you, they wove into the spiritual, the religious life, the worship life of this parish the period of quiet before the service begins, and the period of quiet at the end of the service.. . . "Be still and know that I am God."

....Quakers do that, more than any people I know. Can I describe for you very quickly a Quaker service as I remember it? You gather together, and for some 45 minutes you remain quiet. No stained-glass windows, as much as I appreciate them....

-- no organ, as much as I believe it to be the mightiest instrument of praise known to the mind of man....

-- no altar, as much as I believe a focal point to be necessary....

...but a room as plain as plain can be, people are quieted and hushed by the Spirit, for a significant amount of time, -- and then perchance someone speaks, and all people present permit themselves to believe that God, the Spirit, has chosen that person in particular to speak to them through his voice and their voice.....

I sometimes say to myself, we ought to provide this kind of an opportunity for the people of this parish, maybe at Vespers sometimes, on a Sunday of each month we could follow a pattern of worship as experienced in other denominations -- one Sunday we'd worship the way the Presbyterians do, another Sunday night at Vespers we'd follow the order for the Church of Christ, or the Methodists, or the Episcopalians, or the Roman Catholic order, or the Greek Orthodox order. And I most certainly would covet for us a time when we might follow the pattern of the Quakers. George Fox discovered that light does not shout. Like a candle with its flame burning, it doesn't say, "Pay attention to me." -- it simply glows. You light a candle sometime in a darkened room and discover the transforming quality, just by a candle doing what it's meant to do -- to glow, and we find ourselves being transformed.

George Fox, bless his soul -- the ultimate is not perhaps in being able to fully understand what God says. The ultimate comes in acting upon it -- believing Him.....trusting Him.

-- Walk, then, in love and in truth, so that no matter where you may be found, love and truth will be there. This I most certainly believe. . .

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as
recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS"

Richard Baxter (Luke 18:13)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

This now is the passage of Scripture that we will want to keep in mind as the sermon unfolds, recorded as the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, beginning with the 9th verse:

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one
a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,
God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,
extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this
publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all
that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not
lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote
upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a
sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justi-
fied rather than the other: for every one that
exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that hum-
bleth himself shall be exalted . . . "

Interesting, isn't it, how on certain occasions something hits you right between the eyes that you should have known all along, and then you're able to articulate it, and you say -- "That's exactly it!"

I've had difficulty in my ministry trying to understand why people could dislike Jesus Christ. Don't misunderstand me, I've had a love affair with Him ever since my Sunday School teachers first taught me about Him. I respond to people who are kind, I respond to people who are good. I crave responding to people who show themselves kindly disposed toward me and who love me. And I have always believed that that was the kind of a person Jesus is. And I'm always grateful for people who can make God real to me -- and that I understood Jesus was meant to do...

....and I could never quite understand why eventually they
did Him in in the end....

And then the other day it hit me right between the eyes! You know what? -- He was
always drawing a line! Sometimes I think He was the greatest line-drawer in history
. . . always drawing a line.

He did that, you know. . . .

-- He talked about sheep --(draw a line)-- goats.

-- He talked about Heaven --(draw a line)--He talked about Hell.

-- He talked about the lost --

and then a line was drawn, as He talked about the found.

-- He talked about the saved -- and the unsaved

(and what is that but drawing a line?)

Really now, and knowing human nature as I do, they have an appreciation for lines if they can either do the drawing of a line, or if the line is to their benefit.

When Winifred and I come back from the hills-of-home, you have no idea how happy we are to see those lines coming off Route 270 into 495 -- we appreciate those lines of demarcation....and we fervently pray that people should stay where they're meant to stay as far as that line is concerned. But when it comes to drawing lines, between Heaven and Hell...between light and darkness....between good and evil -- sometimes there's something in us that doesn't like the drawing of a line (with apologies to Robert Frost, of course).

Frankly speaking, you see, in this whole business of goodness and evil, some of us sometimes wish that line were not there -- because we thoroughly enjoy being bad, a little bit bad, you know -- maybe not real bad. But there is that line, you know. And then on the other hand, some of us enjoy being good - but maybe not real good....
...but there is that line.

Before I came to you, serving in Messiah's Church in South Williamsport, we had a number of grand and good people, of course we did. One of them was Louise Wilhelmina Niemeyer -- I suppose she was 70, 75, 80 years of age, a maiden lady. And one day I found myself saying to her, "Be good, Louise." - - and she said, "I should say not! -- I'd be too lonesome!"

....you see, the crowd out there is having a whale-of-a-time,
in being just a little bit bad -- thoroughly enjoying it!

That;s why we don't like that line -- that's so sharp! One side good

..the other side bad.

I'm inclined to believe that this is the trouble, as I observe the human scene. We want to erase the line, we want to pretend it isn't there! And we want to thoroughly enjoy drifting in various shades of gray.

But we need those lines, we need them. We may never be as good as we ought to be, but we need to be reminded of the goodness that we need to espouse. And Jesus was

laying it on the line by drawing the line.

I should tell you that in the passage of Scripture that I read for you, He was drawing the line again. And you can understand that better when I tell you that I didn't read that whole passage of Scripture, I neglected to read the introductory sentence. And the introductory sentence reads like this:

" . . . And he spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others . . . "

...there He was, drawing the line again! People who thought they were good / and they drew a line and looked down their nose at other people....

" . . Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. . . . "

Jesus was drawing lines, a sharp line in this case.

And whether you realize it or not, you and I are always drawing lines. Brace yourself, whether you realize it or not, some of us have been drawing lines ever since we sat down in this place. I have to put it to you -- right up front -- people come to church for different reasons. What's yours?

...that's a personal question, you say. And you're absolutely right, and just because it is personal it needs to be taken seriously. If you don't mind, I'm going to deal with that when I finish speaking this morning.....

Some people come to church to tell God how good He is

-- all kinds of laudatory things are said. And if saying, speaking, that is, were not enough, somewhat to us inadequate, if you please, we loudly sing, or softly chant, what amounts to exclamation . . . the kind of thing we've already done in this service, in what our music ministry has provided us, enthusiastically. And then to top it all off -- you may not have thought of this -- we get instruments into the picture -- the organ as an example, the mightiest instrument of praise known to the human mind, is used where? primarily in churches, and cathedrals, and synagogues. Where will you inevitably find the organ? Primarily in temples of praise. And when we come to church we praise God for any number of things, and all

because of who He is and what He does. That's why some of us come to church, and it's not a bad reason . . . it's a good reason.

Now get ready for this one -- you're not expecting this one:

Some people come to church to tell God that His track record needs improving, He should up-date His activity a bit

-- God, according to their needs or pressing predicament, hasn't been doing as much as they think He's done in the past, nor even as much as they think He's capable of doing in the present moment. And they show up in church on a given Sunday, they bring such matters to His attention. This could be true -- there are some of you here today just because you said, "God, I have this problem, and I want it resolved now! You can do it, but I don't see much activity on your part, God. You've produced before -- why are you dragging your feet this time?"

....people who come to church in this manner and this method recall better and brighter days, and they honestly believe that bigger benefits could and should be in the offing, right now. That's why some people come to church, really now. And it could be a somewhat acceptable reason, as long as it's honest, even though it's done boldly.

You ready for more?

Some people, I do believe, come to church not to talk about God, but to talk about themselves.

-- and in doing so they, like as not, will probably do one of two things -- maybe both! - if they could. Let's reduce it to ourselves:

...we who have come to church may either, as we talk about ourselves, tell God how good we are . . . or, how bad we have been behaving. Now, let's think about that for a little while....

First, this business of telling God how good we are. You're about to protest somewhat, aren't you? You really can't quite figure out why anyone, and especially the preacher, whose responsibility is to get you on your feet as soon as you're here, to get you on your feet in no time at all when the service begins with such words as these upon your lips: "We poor sinners confess unto Thee . . . " -- that such a person would ever so much as imply that we're showing up, whatever effort it takes, to draw God's attention to our goodness. Well now, maybe we don't say it so much in words, but we sure do have a very comfortable feeling right now, or at least a few moments ago, didn't we? We

feel very good about ourselves, being here... We feel very good about ourselves, being with one another. We feel very good being with people who when they stand, look in the direction toward God!

...and yet when we take time to think about it, that Pharisee felt very good about himself when he went to church, felt so good about it that he mouthed off, listed all the reasons why he felt God should give him brownie points . . . as for instance:
- we are inside God's House -- that makes us the good ones

(you draw a line)

...there are all those people who aren't here, the folks who don't show up. Psychologically, we're in -- they're out.

We feel good about ourselves! Wittingly or unwittingly, we're branding them bad.

Be careful!

- we haven't come empty-handed -- that makes us feel good;
/ ...the bad ones are the people who don't support the Lord's work.

...and even though we have to give more because they give less, the net result remains, we feel the better because of it. And this really does make us feel good as we stand at attention on this Sunday morning roll call in this place:

"Present, God -- present and accounted for!

And look what I've brought you!"

-- and when you come to think of it, we feel good while we're here, standing in God's presence, because we haven't told a deliberate lie, we haven't told a great big black bold lie for so long that we can't even remember when we told the tiniest bit of a lie....

/...and all the time there are all those other people whom we know, with whom we have to deal, who cheat, steal and deceive -- ah, we draw the line, you see --

We haven't done that, we're good --

/ -- they've done it, they're doing it,
they're bad!

And in contrast, sharp or otherwise, that's the way it is!

You know, of course, that makes us the good ones. Come now, we'd like to think that at some time in some way or another we'd like to think that before this hour is over, that God will make note of that, and give us good and proper credit. That makes us feel good, especially as we anticipate the way this sermon is going to end! You ought to sit down sometime and seriously probe the meaning of the liturgy and follow it through to its logical conclusion....

...We begin telling God that we're not very good, that we are a bunch of miserable sinners....and the service ends, then, after we've talked like that to God, with God stretching forth His hand and the preacher raises his arms in benediction

(benediction - that's the word, it comes from the Latin which means "a word well spoken")

...and by the time the service is over, no matter what we've done, no matter what we've said, no matter how we have been in the past week, God's going to say to us, "I bless you."

....God's going to say to you, "I've forgiven you!"

....God's going to say to you, "I need you -- I'm counting on you.!"

...and that makes us feel good.

Please, I'm frequently transparent when I stand among you. You have no idea what it does to me sometimes when one of you may say to me, "Pastor, I need you - - Pastor, I'm counting on you" - - that makes me want to be better than I am, in order that I may produce, that your need could be met. And when this service is over and God gives us His benediction, that is exactly what He is saying to us: "I need you, I'm counting on you to go out into the world and to live as my obedient servants -- to get on with the business of loving and living and laughing! and learning. So to all intents and purposes we feel good because by the time the benediction is pronounced, God's giving us His stamp of approval, a final and good word spoken by God, and beaming from Heavenward toward us embracingly.

Now we need to pass to the other person, that perchance here and there among us there could be some folks who have come to church to talk about themselves, not to tell God how good they are, but how bad they are. To accommodate such people, the liturgy is sublime in this regard. The very first item on our agenda in this marvelous way of worshipping that we exercise in the Lutheran Church, the very first item on the agenda is the Confession of Sins. To the person who's come to church to tell God that he's not as good as he knows he ought to be, who's been more bad than he should have been, the heading is there in bold letters in the liturgy:

CONFESSION OF SINS

The older Prayer Book of the Anglican Church went so far as to phrase it this way: not simply, "We poor sinners" -- but "We poor miserable sinners . . ."

...not simply to say, "We have offended thee, O God" -- but it said

" . . have grievously offended thee, O God."

Now, no one much likes to invade the privacy of another's prayer life. I think I did that once unwittingly. I greatly appreciate being able to come to church and sit where you sit, and this occurs for me every now and then when we have a plain service of the Holy Communion, and somebody else conducts it.

A number of Sundays ago I came on that first Sunday of the month and sat near the back of the Nave, Had my private devotions, I prayed, my soul was being made quiet . . . completely unaware of the fact that somebody had come in and sat behind me, and I was totally unaware of that until my silence was broken by something that I heard being said -- that precious person behind me, in soft and earnest words, said this, as she had her personal devotions, "Dear God, forgive me all my sins, and help me to become better....Dear God, forgive everybody their sins, and help them to become better."

. . . to the day I die I hope that memory will keep that voice before me, for you see, the two go together. There is no way we can become better until we see ourselves as the forgiven.

The way to a better step is to be accepted in love by a step that might have been taken earlier that was less than commendatory. That's what forgiveness does! And God says, "Come along now, you're forgiven, in order that you might become better!" And that's the only way you're going to become better! You see, that's exactly what forgiveness does. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, which I've already recited for you twice, that was the cardinal issue: the Pharisee was without fault -- his record was beyond reproach! He had in his own eyes reached the point where he could stand before God and say, "Look how good I am!" He honestly permitted himself to believe that he had arrived -- so much so that he had no need for God!

...no one ever gets that good! With all my soul, if you'd ask me what life has taught me, I'd have to say at best --
at best -- we've blundered, we've never quite pulled it off
as well as it should have been, especially in the eyes of God.

But the Pharisee thought he had.

Now the other chap -- remember, the line is drawn . . . the other chap, poor fellow, he saw himself so down that the only way he could go was up. With God's help he could become better, so he didn't spend his energy vindicating himself,

drifting around in various areas of gray. In the parable that Jesus spoke, the Pharisee was condemned because all that he did was to speak about his goodness -- now, not that Jesus condemns goodness. The publican was praised because all that he did was to talk about his badness -- not so, that's only part of the story. The publican was praised because he first thought about God, and then he talked about his sins, and then he talked about mercy. "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." And that, too, is in our liturgy.....

. . . are you aware how often in this service this morning we've said, "Lord, have mercy[" . . . "Lord, have mercy[" . . . "Lord, have mercy[" . . . "Lord, have mercy[" . . . "? . . .

We sing the praise of the man who couldn't muster up to his credit a single good thing, because low down as he was, he became the closest to God. And the Pharisee was so good that he was separated from God.

This is another in the series of sermons on "Favorite Texts of Famous Persons" -- this is the text of a preacher. Incidentally, of all these thirteen sermons in this series, we'll only talk about two preachers in the series. All the rest are lay people. This is the favorite text of Richard Baxter, a marvelous English preacher of 200 years ago, who doubled and tripled his congregation within a ten-year period by a simple thing -- without benefit of a lot of elaborate programming -- never so much as a telephone or a mimeograph machine, never as much as with the benefit of a staff . . . but Richard Baxter was a person who, whatever his sin, called out to God, "Have mercy!" . . . and he knew himself forgiven. And from that moment on he preached as a dying man to dying men, and in every encounter that he had -- "God loves you" . . . "God loves you" . . . "God loves you -- respond to His mercy and walk in that measure of redeeming love." That was the key-note of his preaching.

I should hope that when I for one person stand at this sacred desk, you would be aware of the fervor of faith, for I too preach to you as a dying man -- to dying men ...which is simply to say, as one who knows he's been forgiven. To all of you who may still need the awareness of what it is to be numbered in the body of the redeemed.

What do I do on my knees before I come to this sacred desk -- are you aware of that, that I pray before I come here? These are the words I read, the words of Richard Baxter:

"I seldom come out of the pulpit that my conscience smiteth me, that I have not been more serious and fervent in such a case. It accuseth not so much of for want of ornaments or elegancy, nor for letting fall an unhandsome word. But it asks me, How could

you speak of life and death with such a heart? How
could you preach of Heaven in such a careless,
sleepy manner? Do you believe what you say? Are
you in earnest or in jest? Should you not weep
over such people and should you not have tears
that interrupt your words?

Truly, this is the zeal that conscience doth ring
in my ears: O Lord, do that on our own souls that
you would have us do on the souls of others."

"In my heart there rings a melody, a melody of God's forgiving love, " . . . which
makes me want to get on with another day. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

"SOMETHING TO REMEMBER"

(Matthew 17:1-9)

WE MAKE so little time, O Lord, to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of your Holy Word. That we should make the most of it, cleanse us from sin and enlighten us by your Holy Spirit; in the name of Jesus Christ, who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

By this time you're probably aware of the fact that the sermon series for the most part being heard from this Saint Luke Pulpit has been on the general theme of "FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS." That series, now, is being interrupted for the next few weeks for understandable reasons. The sermon that you are about to hear at this time has been especially prepared for this Sunday that marks the Transfiguration of Our Blessed Lord.

The sermon is based upon that passage of Scripture, the Gospel for the Day, Matthew 17: verses 1-9, and the sermon bears the title: "SOMETHING TO REMEMBER."

We all need that shining moment that did occur -- that shining moment which comes to us as something to remember, someone to remember, some place to remember, an experience over and above what we ordinarily know, so that when we recall it we're stabilized, and we can persevere with patience the course which we have yet to take.

I want to talk to you this morning really about two things: first, about something that happened, and then secondly, why I think it happened the way it did.

Now please listen carefully as I read for you again what has already been read for us, and read so well -- the Gospel lesson for this particular Sunday. We can afford to give it this added attention for two reasons at least -- one, it is the passage of Scripture that appears in all three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, and basically very much the same -- little variation.

...and the second reason why I ask you to give it added attention is because all that you're going to hear, presumably, in the next eighteen minutes, is inspired by this passage of Scripture:

" . . And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.' And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. . . . "

Now let's be honest with each other. If I were to stand here this morning and tell you, I want to talk to you about a sermon that Jesus once preached -- chances are you wouldn't have too much difficulty, even if I related for you a parable that He incorporated into His sermon, a parable which the people who heard it originally had some difficulty in getting the main point.....so much so that Jesus had to chide them. . . well, say it again, if I were giving you a sermon that Jesus preached, you wouldn't have too much difficulty. It might be over and above your ability to maintain the standard that Jesus exalts, but at least Jesus-the-preacher-- that you can handle.

- - or if I came here this morning and said, "I want to talk to you about one of the miracles that Jesus performed -- now maybe you can't understand miracles, and maybe you can't honestly believe that it is possible for Jesus to have done them....I know that there are people who have great difficulty with miracles -- Thomas Jefferson was one of them. There's a so-called Jefferson Bible in which he went through the New Testament, he went all through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and cut out every reference to the supernatural or to the miracle. It didn't mean a thing to him, so he discounted them . . .

...but even if I said, "I want to talk to you about a miracle," -- by and large, most of you would stick with me. And if you couldn't understand how it

could be a display of power on His part, at least you'd be impressed by the fact it was a display of His compassion - - for when He made blind people see....He made blind people see because He loved them.
- when He made lame people walk He made lame people walk because He loved them....

Now, when it comes this morning to say to you, "I'm going to talk about the Transfiguration" - - come now, are you turned off already? Transfiguration...the Ascension, the Resurrection - - these sometimes throw us, they are beyond our understanding. But they did happen. And you can't ignore it. What I've read for you this morning appears in three of the Gospels almost word for word. What I read for you this morning dominates the passages of the fourth Gospel, as Jesus Christ is revealed to us. If you think I'm putting you on a bit, be patient with me now while I share it with you in this manner:

. . . Suppose Pastor David took a group of our young people, or older people, young adults -- I don't care, and he said to Gary Lee Pritchett, our Resident Caretaker at Hallowood, "Now, about ten o'clock at night I'm going to take a limited number of these people with me to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain, and you make the necessary arrangements. I'm going to expose them to a tremendous religious experience" . . . and then they come down off the mountain, say five hours later, and somebody runs to Gary Lee Pritchett, our Resident-Caretaker-at-Hallowood, and says, "I saw Jesus Christ! - - I saw Moses! - - I saw Elijah!

I heard a voice from Heaven!"

...you'd squirm. Some of you might even arrange for a meeting with the Church Council, and say, What's going on up there? These people saying they see faces, they hear voices, they see Jesus Christ! - - what's going on up there?"

Now when I put it to you in that light, can you see now why some people shy away from dealing with the Transfiguration, because that's exactly what did happen! And it's a matter of Scriptural record. There were eye-witnesses -- Peter, James and John -- and they talked about it so much that when Matthew wrote his Gospel he incorporated it . . . when Mark wrote his Gospel, he put it in . . . and when Luke wrote his Gospel, he made room for it.

Now I told you I want to talk to you about two things -- the thing that happened . . . and why I think it happened. What happened, by this time you ought to be familiar with it, you've heard it read twice. I've referred to it in one way or another up to this very point -- Jesus with three very close friends spent time apart from everybody else, up on a mountain, they withdrew, in a retreat. And a profound experience takes place! -- over and above anything they had ever known, in which the voice of God was heard, the divine imprimatur was placed on Jesus Christ, and Peter, James and John said, "We saw a person who had been dead for a thousand years -- Moses . . . we saw a person who had been dead for 800 years -- Elijah. And we observed them talking with Jesus. Then when it was over, our eyes were focused on Jesus Christ, and Him alone."

-- now that's what happened. I would discourage you with all my soul from ignoring it. Accept it. You may not be able to fully understand it, but you ignore it to the peril of your soul . . .

It was an extraordinary thing, and there are some things extraordinary that cannot be explained. You simply accept the fact that the experience was a valid one for those who shared it.

Now don't be too troubled by that. You may have had a moment in your life, a shining moment, an extraordinary moment, when something became crystal clear to you, and your life has never again been the same. You have been stabilized because of it, you have been inspired because of it, and you've lifted yourself above the mundane features of this world. It had happened.

I know that some of you at some moment in your life have had someone look into your eyes, and that person has allowed you to believe that that person trusts you, that that person respects you, that that person expects from you certain things that they are absolutely certain you can deliver, that you're capable of producing.

I've never hesitated to be transparent to you. You mean much to me, this parish, this Saint Luke congregation. But the day I left the first parish that God gave me to serve, unashamedly I said to them, "You will never know what you have done for me -- you were the first people ever to call me 'Pastor.'" And when that word 'Pastor' is spoken, it involves respect and trust. It means that they make you, to all intents and purposes, the guardian of their souls. And every now and then I need to remind myself of those shining moments when people said 'Pastor.' Do you understand what I mean?

Don't think that I am sentimental, but there are some things that need to be said. I hope to the day I die my soul will be shaken when I hear two people -- as no other two people in the world can do it -- say "Pop." We need these moments, these shining moments, when it occurs to us, and lifts us up and above and beyond the way we deal with things normally. And that's what happened on the Mount of the Transfiguration -- I'll put it for you this way . . .

...they had been with Jesus for some time, it was a crisis in mid-career, I think, to use professional terminology of our day -- it might even have been a mid-life crisis, if one can be so bold as to apply that to Jesus. Things had been going along fairly well, but now some of the disciples discovered that Jesus was talking about things yet to come, and they were quite formidable -- talking about going up to Jerusalem, talking about a cross, talking about a terrible death . . . so much so that they couldn't understand it, that's the way He was talking.....

Now, straight in the middle of the ball-bat, He says, "Peter, James and John, you come with me. We're going up in the mountain, just to be apart" And while they were there something happened. I'll tell you what I think it was . . .

...they had been tripping along with Jesus now for some time, maybe they'd almost had a casual relationship -- it was routine -- always saying the right thing, always doing the right thing, always allowing God to flow through His life -- maybe they were losing their perspective of all of this....

You know what happens every now and then in our routine relationships -- God allows us a time when we're jolted by something in order to see something in proper focusI think that's the way it was on the Mount of the Transfiguration. They just didn't dare get used to Jesus as just being another teacher, as just being another preacher, as just being a wonderful friend, as just being another in a series of miracle-workers that the world had seen . . . it was incumbent upon them that they now see Him in clear and sharp focus as very God of very God. And that's what happened in this Transfiguration experience. . . . the voice from Heaven . . .

-- and please -- don't press me too hard, and don't you press this thing too hard, but every now and then we have to appreciate Scriptural truth from a purely human perspective....

Which leads me to say to you that when Jesus took on our flesh, when Jesus became human, He took on all the limitations of the flesh -- which is my way of

became human, He took on all the limitations of the flesh -- which is my way of saying to you, Jesus was human too -- He was without sin, but He was human. And who knows but what at this time, mid-career, mid-crisis, crisis in mid-life -- He needed to be reassured of who He was, of what He was meant to do. Any number of people have an identity crisis, and when that happens they need to be reminded of who they are, and what they're meant to do.

That pathetic moment in "Death of a Salesman" when Willy Loman's sons stand with their mother when they put Willy's body down into the grave. And one of them says, "What a pity -- "(or words to that effect) " -- he never really knew who he was, and that's why he lived such a pathetic life, he never really knew who he was." We need to be reassured of who we are, and what we're meant to do, and that's what happened on the Mount of the Transfiguration -- God gets into the act, and-- "Jesus, if it's reassurance that you need -- here, take a look at Moses, take a look at Elijah....Moses and Elijah -- you talk to Jesus. You confirm it. Tell him it's worth it. Tell him how I never forsook you -- tell him how I used you! Go ahead, Moses! -- go ahead, Elijah! -- tell him!"

...and then the voice from Heaven itself, the very voice of God, unmistakably, "This is my beloved son -- Jesus, you're mine. And since you're mine I have work for you to do, and I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, I will always be with you!"

....and it happened in the presence of Peter, James and John.

And why do you suppose it happened in the presence of Peter, James and John? -- they needed this kind of recognition of Jesus. And from a purely human perspective -- be careful, now, I'm skating on thin ice, who knows but what, as Jesus traveled closer and closer to Calvary, He might stand in need of Peter, James and John saying to Him, "But, Jesus, remember -- we were with you when that vision splendid came -- Jesus, remember, we heard that voice from Heaven -- we know who you are, we know what you're meant to do!"

There are those of us who have given thanks to God for people who have come to us and said, "We know who you are, and we know what you're meant to do, and to be." And every one of us needs those moments, those shining moments, when it became crystal clear to us. So I look upon the Transfiguration. We all need the moment splendid, the shining moment, that stabilizes us when the pressures become great and the temptation to be less than what we're meant to be.

Why do you suppose we make as much of Confirmation as we do in Saint Luke? We have them make banners, we have them choose a Confirmation Hymn, we have them

choose a Confirmation Verse -- deliberately we've adapted the Confirmation Service to make it as personal as we possibly can -- where a person comes up to the altar, walks up to the very shadow of the altar itself, and is addressed with this question: "Do you love the Lord Jesus, and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?" ...and then that moment when only one voice is heard -- why do you suppose we do it that way? -- to provide them, in days to come, the memory of a shining moment, when they did say that they did believe.

I try not to forget my Ordination Day, I try to remember it specifically -- a shining moment when holy hands were placed on my head and I was named a Minister of the Word and Sacrament. We need to recall those shining moments.

I smile sometimes to myself when I do it, because I have no intent of running up a photographer's bill -- but there's one photograph that I insist on when a wedding takes place. I don't even ask the bride and groom if it's alright, I ask the photographer, "Take this shot, will you please" -- they're kneeling, they're kneeling before an altar, and a hand in blessing is over them. Hopefully, you see, some day in the future they might look back and remember that shining moment when nobly promises were made and commitments were made, and in the name not only of themselves, but in the name of Jesus Christ.

Human as we are, we all need to remember some shining moment, as we experienced it somewhere, some place, some thing, and with someone. You need to hear this again..she was a member of this congregation, and like as not I think of it especially on this Sunday because it was on a Sunday night that it happened. He'd been home on leave -- he was flying back to his post. Somewhere over Virginia a terrible thunderstorm, an electrical storm -- they all crashed to their death. In the letter that she wrote me, up to that time, she said -- "It was as though we were reaching for the stars, we had it made, Pastor . . . and then my world fell apart."

...then she went on to tell me what she did -- a letter that came to me years after the incident. "I had somebody take care of my little brood, Pastor, and then off I went. I went back to the place where he proposed to me... I went back to the place where we were married....I went back to the place where our first child was born and baptized . . ." What was she doing? -- she was recalling shining moments -- recalling exceedingly precious experiences over and above the ordinary that could constitute a vision splendid. The amazing thing is that you and I are capable of comprehending a vision splendid.. . . and therein lies our hope as human beings. Without it, we become less than human.

...this I most certainly believe.....

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

"JESUS: ON JESUS" -- "TO SEEK THE LOST"

(Luke 15:1-32)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The 1984 Lenten series of sermons being preached from the Saint Luke pulpit has the general theme -- "Who Are You, Jesus," and for the most part we're centering on what Jesus has to say about Himself.

Who are you? How do you know who and what a person really is? Some people build a wall around themselves, some people erect a veil of privacy and defy us to tear it down or to invade it. They much prefer to be like that. It is not always easy to know who and what a person really is.

But we attempt to find out. And in our attempt to find out we may do several things: we may ask the person directly -- Who are you? -- or we may give the person a chance in a group setting to speak regarding himself or herself. It's a salutary thing for a person to try to articulate and to see himself as he uses words to describe himself. Counselors, analysts, psychologists, psychiatrists -- very properly and very wisely do this sort of thing when, in a session, whether it's group or one-to-one, they allow a person to speak in self-identification. And there comes a time when it's very important that that should be done.

Now when it's done, I'll grant you there is always a risk. The picture that I may paint of myself could be as I actually am or as I would like to be, or as I would want you to perceive me, and there is always the risk . . . and the picture then sometimes could be fact or it could be fantasy, and it could be blurred, less than true. Who are you? It's important that we allow people to answer for themselves. And Jesus on more than one occasion did that very thing. That's why you have a whole series of sermons during the Lenten season this year: "Jesus: On Jesus" -- the "I AM -- " sayings of Jesus.

I would also go to people who have known someone if I wanted to know what a person is really like, I'd go to his friends. Now, you've known this person for quite a while, presumably he's laid his soul bare to you as he may not have done to other people -- "Tell me, what do you think this person is like?" -- so, friends could be helpful.

-- and would you believe it, one's enemies could also be helpful.
How do people who are not kindly disposed toward me see me? They,
too, could provide an insight....

And then there's something else: if you really want to know what a person is like, you may place some value on his words and the words of other people, but the acid test comes in what a person does. Let it be said repeatedly -- a person is as a person does. Let me see how that person performs, let me see how that person functions. So today it's the most natural thing in the world that we would take a look at Jesus Christ -- in the way He saw Himself functioning, and what He honestly believed He was meant to do.

Incidentally, the answers to all these questions that I've proposed to you as the sources to which we'd go mesh together beautifully in the case of Jesus Christ. Jesus: on Jesus -- what did He say of Himself? Here's the text, the 10th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke -- "Jesus: on Jesus" --

" . . . The Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost . . . "

.....that's how He saw Himself functioning. And to that end He devoted all of His energy.....

Friends -- how did you see Jesus?

...one of his friends summed it up perfectly when he said
"He was someone who went around doing good."

Enemies of Christ -- How did you size Jesus up?

...that introductory verse to the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, which is intended to be required reading for you before you came to church this morning -- that 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke is one of the grandest chapters in the entire New Testament. For one thing, it's a trilogy -- it contains three perfectly beautiful and absolutely wonderful stories that Jesus told. And in the telling of each of those stories He's providing some measure of identification as He related magnificently to each of the three stories that He told. Now you should know, the introductory verse to that entire chapter gives us an idea of how He was seen by His enemies . . .

" . . . Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them . . . "

It wasn't the first time He had heard that kind of talk. It wasn't the first time that He knew people were sizing Him up like that. You remember that Monday, the first Monday in March, when we had the all-day Bible Study for anybody who wanted to come, on the hour -- we talked about Zacchaeus. And we dealt very earnestly with the theme that here was Zacchaeus, ostracized, harrassed -- alienated -- separated from people who didn't even want him around, who were very content in keeping him separated . . . so much so that he had to run away from the crowd, climb up a tree -- that's where they wanted him -- up there! -- not down there with them. But listen to this: Love always takes the initiative, Love always takes the first step. So Jesus Christ says to Zacchaeus, long before Zacchaeus even called him by name -- Jesus Christ says, "Zacchaeus, I see you, I found you!"

(Love takes the initiative)

----"Zacchaeus, you get yourself down! -- Zacchaeus, listen to me!

I'm going to go to your house for supper -- we're going to have a long talk . . . "

...Love takes the initiative -- Love takes the first step. Love doesn't wait for somebody else to do it. And that's exactly what happened. And as a result, in this case -- not always! -- Love doesn't always get a return! Perfectly mindful of that, responding realistically, Love nonetheless sees it's in duty bound to take the initiative . . . there's no guarantee that there will be a return. But in this case there was, handsomely so. Zacchaeus turned around completely in his life.

Now why do I tell you this? Because there were people who saw all this happening and they murmured, and said, "He's gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" They were perfectly content to keep that person in his isolation, to allow him to be alienated, to allow him to be separated. But not so Jesus Christ.

Who are you, Jesus -- how do you see yourself? -- to what end do you devote your energy? Why are you here? . . .

"I came to seek and to save the lost . . . "

Now in this magnificent 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke there are three stories. One, the story of a man who was a shepherd, he had 100 sheep....and as anyone who has traveled in that part of the world knows, he brings the sheep back at night to their shelter. It can be a man-made shelter, or it can be a natural enclosure, a rock that's large enough to encompass a flock of sheep. And as the shepherd brings them at night to bed them in, whether he calls them by name or by number -- "95....96....97....98....99 . . . one is missing. And according to that marvelous interpretation of the Good Shepherd with which Jesus Christ identified Himself, at the risk of his own life -- the shepherd goes out and he seeks the lost

sheep until he finds it.

Then He tells the second story, about a woman who had ten silver coins, maybe a necklace, maybe a bracelet - - what a marvelous story could be told as to how she got them and to why they were dear and precious to her. But one day she discovers one is lost. She panics. And she has only one thing in mind: the lost should be found. And when she finds it she calls in the whole neighborhood and says, "Rejoice with me, for what I have lost I have now found!"

Now follow me carefully - - the first story: one-out-of-a-hundred

- - the second story: one-out-of-ten

- - now the third story: one-out-of-two

There was a man who had two sons, and one became very willful and said, "I can't stand it here any longer! I want to do my own thing! I want to be me! - - - and he separated himself, deliberately, willfully, and goes out into the far country and gets lost. And then Jesus tells how the old man never gave up on him . . . one day he comes back, and there's singing and there's joy and there's merriment, and there's feasting . . . and the old man says, "This one who was lost is found!"

...and Jesus says, that's the way it is in Heaven. Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save the lost - - that means I have come to rescue you."

Now look at it very freely and very frankly: how is anyone rescued? It isn't because the victim comes from his miserable situation to somebody else. The victim is rescued only when the person is in a position to do the saving, goes from where he is to where the victim is! So Jesus Christ comes to us.

That's the meaning of the Incarnation. I need giants in my life -- we all need giants in our lives. Pope John 23rd became a giant for me. I need to tell you three things about him. I think I still have hanging outside what had been my office on the main floor of the Christian Education Building a picture of Pope John 23rd and somebody else -- he's the one with the big Italian face and the round shoulders. Three things from that man that have cast a shadow benignly upon my life --

-- Pope John the 23rd is the one who's supposed to have said -- good advice for anybody who works with people -- "You see a great deal; you correct as much as you can; and you forget as much as you can."

The second thing in the life of Pope John the 23rd: it was diagnosed: incurable cancer, he was going to die, he knew he was going to die. Right after his death they found a note that he had written on his desk -- something that he had written.

I'd be very happy if I could tell you that it was a quotation from Scripture, but it wasn't . . . but something that I think Scripture could have inspired and equally sublime -- God forgive me when I say it -- equally sublime as a passage of Scripture -- a very simple thing. In anticipation of death he had written:

"My bags are packed."

...which was simply his way of saying, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit -- I'm ready!"

Now the third thing. The first Christmas when he was Holy Father he left his residence in the Vatican and he went outside the walls of the Vatican -- on Christmas Day in the morning...to visit a prison. And as he moved from one cell block to another he was heard to say, "You could not come to me where I was -- so I have come to you" -- what is that but the sublime meaning of the Incarnation! In our sinfulness, in our wickedness, in our lostness we cannot go to God....so God comes to us. And if Pope John 23rd wanted to be absolutely honest he could have said, "Maybe you would not have come to me" . . . and there are people like that, who have no intention whatsoever to either seek out the good or respond to the good. But nonetheless that doesn't keep the good from going to the bad.

I wish I had time to talk with you about the way people become lost, and separated, and isolated. Very hurriedly -- some like the lost sheep, who simply strayed away, not paying much attention to where it was going and got to where it was inadvertently. That's the way some people stray, and get lost...

...some people like that lost coin get lost due to no circumstances of their own whatsoever. Something happens, and they get isolated, and separated, and when is a thing lost? -- it's lost when it's our of relationship, when it's somewhere where it doesn't belong and has value only when it is where it belongs, an environment where its full potential can develop -- a diamond in the gutter...really now, it

has little value as long as it's in the gutter, but
only where it's meant to be do we look upon it as something prized and precious.

But the thing that you've got to remember, which is exceedingly difficult for some of us, that when a thing or a person is lost, it's lost, and it doesn't do much good for people to sit in judgment when the thing that needs most to be done is to minister to the person that's lost./

I would never go to a physician, if I had an accident, who as soon as the physician saw me, started to give me a lecture -- blame me for having been foolish enough,

or stupid enough, to have found myself in a situation where I could become injured. The thing I want most is for him to minister to me in the situation in which I find myself. Which is simply my way of saying to you, when a person is lost -- whether a person becomes lost because like the sheep it simply strayed away . . . or like a willful goat...or like one of the two sons who deliberately chose to get lost -- when a person is lost, he's lost. And the effect is the same.

To that end Jesus came to people not to condemn, not to condone their stupidity or folly, but to show compassion. "Who are you, Jesus?" - -

- - "I am someone who came to seek and to save the lost."

....and every single one of us runs the risk of becoming lost. And the happy thought is, there's a God who with undiscourageable love, like the Hound of Heaven, pursues us, and He keeps at it until we respond. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

O GOD, We make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. That we should make the most of it now, enlighten us by Your Holy Spirit. In the Name of Jesus Christ, who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

"THROUGH AN OPEN DOOR"
(John 10: 1-9)

If I were an artist and I had been commissioned to paint a picture of the disciples, I know exactly how I would picture them in a way that I have never seen them pictured on anyone's canvas. I'd have them pictured with puzzled looks on their faces -- for surely it happened quite frequently -- every now and then when Jesus was speaking . . . I can see them, with that look on their faces indicating they can't possibly understand what He was trying to say. It happened so often. Listen for it now as this passage of Scripture is read:

" . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber . . . "

(this is Jesus talking now, and His disciples are close by -- they're hearing everything that He's saying)

" . . But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.

This parable spake Jesus unto them; but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. . . . "

And so presumably as He stands there looking at them, with this kind of look on their faces -- "Please run that by us again, Jesus -- go over that once more!"...which He did.

/

So then He said to them again,

" . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am
the door of the sheep. . . . by me if any
man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall
go in and out, and find pasture . . . "

One of the problems that Jesus had on His hands was that people would not always understand who He was. Some people wanted to make Him out that He was something other than He was. And when some people had some idea as to who He really was, they weren't sure that they could accept it. So very frequently Jesus as He dealt with people had to understand just where He was -- in their understanding of Him....so much so, on one occasion He pressed the disciples to the point and He said,

"What are people saying about me? Who do they
think I am?"

...and then, looking them directly in the eyes --

"And who do you say that I am? How well am I being received?"

No one wants to be misunderstood, honestly now! And some of us, in our desire to be fully understood are quite willing to be very transparent to other people, as open as we can possibly be. Jesus Christ really serves little if any purpose in our life if we really don't reach the point where we know who He is. And that's exactly why this series of sermons is being preached from the Saint Luke pulpit this Lententide of 1984 on the general theme of "Who Are You, Jesus?" And who can answer better than He? And on more than one occasion, even before people asked Him, He volunteered and told us who He is. Who are you, Jesus? -- the question remains the same, but the answers that He gave are not always the same. This morning we're dealing with an answer that's entirely different than the answer that you'll get next week, and the answer we got last Sunday, and the Sunday before that. Today in the story that He told, He said, "You want to know who I am? -- I am the door!"

You should know that years ago when I had the good fortune to go to the Holy Land for the first time I made up my mind that there is one thing in particular that I didn't want to miss, that of all the things that I could see, this most certainly would be at the top of my list. And I might surprise you....

- it wasn't especially to go to the Garden of Gethsemane,
as much as I wanted to be there, to identify with the
prayer life of Jesus, and His agony....
- it wasn't that I felt the need to go to Bethlehem,
where He was born.....

-- it wasn't that I couldn't think of leaving the Holy
Land without staying for a little while in the
Garden of the Resurrection, important as that would
be for me.....

But this is what I wanted to see, I think more than anything else -- it was related to the first passage of Scripture that I ever memorized:

"The Lord is my shepherd . . . "

-- I wanted to see a Palestinian shepherd, that's what I wanted to see, and with a flock of sheep.

I was doubly blessed. I got not only to see the shepherd and his sheep but I also saw in a village the large enclosure where the shepherds would bring their sheep at night-fall. It was like a community effort, more than one shepherd would use it. But each shepherd knew his own sheep by name, so when it came time to go, he could sort them out.

And then I also had this good fortune -- you see, they used a communal shelter only in the severe months of the year. But when the weather was more ideal -- the late spring, summer, early fall -- the shepherd had his flocks out in the hillside, far removed from the village. So when it came time to bed them down at night, to provide them with shelter and security, he'd look for some natural setting, it was an enclosure underneath a huge rock, and this overhang would provide the very shelter that they needed at night. And like as not there was a very narrow entrance-way, naturally formed, about as high as the height of an average sheep.

But the sheep had to be protected at night. I'm sorry to have to tell you that there were not all good shepherds. There were some who were wicked and evil, and they'd steal the sheep that belonged to another shepherd, especially at night. And then the sheep had to be protected from the animals that were prowling under cover of darkness. So there had to be some kind of a door, and there was no natural door for this enclosure, this over-hang of a rock. So Jesus said -- remember now, remember what the shepherd would do, and they were familiar with that -- the shepherd would lie himself down in that entrance-way, and he himself would constitute the door! No one got in except by him, no one went out except by him.

Now Jesus was telling them this story in order to get His point across that He wanted to make: that He is the one by which people find security, shelter, protection against all the ills of a wicked world. He even went so far as to allow them to believe, and purposely so, that He was the door-way to God -- that no one ever came to God except as they came through Him.

Now let's talk about doors for a minute. Doors have always fascinated me. The local newspaper in the time in which I grew up ran a series of photographic studies on doors. The one they featured was at that very beautiful brick house, a modified sort of mansion, which became almost the center of that little town, at Broad Street and Loyalsock Avenue. I'm sorry to tell you, things are never as they once were. When I go back now that house is no longer there, it's been dismantled -- a modern branch bank is there, with its driveway window, its automatic teller. Some of us lament it -- things never are as once they were, and we need to brace ourselves when we go back home . . . never quite the same.

But I do remember that house as it once was, with its very beautiful door -- impressive -- and all that surrounded it to make the entrance a very graceful way.

Doors have always fascinated me. There are all kinds of doors, you know -- little doors....big doors....light doors - heavy doors....doors made out of wood, doors made out of bronze, doors made out of plastic, doors made out of fiber-glass.....doors that open and close on conventional hinges, doors that open and close like an accordinian as they fold.....doors that slide into walls, doors which, with the press of a button by remote control will roll up into the ceiling of a garage.....

But they all serve the same function. Doors may differ in their size and their quality, in the material. But the function and the purpose of a door remains, to keep something on the outside from entering, and to protect what's on the inside from what's on the outside. They all serve a purpose.

And that door also serves as something that separates. The only way I can get on the inside is to go through that door. The only way I go to the outside is to go from where I am through that door into an outside world.

The child in the heart of the man remains, you know that, of course you do, and the older you become the more real that is. The child in me recalls how when I was a youngster my dad would take me to town to be outfitted, once a year, for my clothing. It might be either springtime or it might be done in the fall of the year when we got ready for school. And I remember especially when I had my first pair of long trousers. I got that suit for my confirmation, a teenager. We went to town.

In that town of maybe 20 - 30 thousand at that time, as every town had, there was a square -- Market Square, if you please. There were three or four clothing stores in that Market Square. One was owned and operated by the Stearn Brothers, Bill and

Abe. Either one of them, Bill or Abe, would be standing on the sidewalk, waiting for prospective customers to go by, and as my dad and I would walk by -- I can still see how Abe (or Bill) came out, with the glad-hand and the smile, and before we knew it, we were inside the store! -- because he knew he had something on the inside that he believed we ought to have. And there are always people beckoning us in their direction to cross the threshold of their place, because they think they have something and that we ought to have.

The limited number of times that I go to a shopping mall, or to a business district, I'm quite intrigued by the way people make their entrance-ways attractive -- because "there's something on the inside that we want you to have."

Did it ever occur to you how different your life has become because of the doors you've entered?...or the places you seek out because you want to pass a particular door? There are some doors you seek out and to which you want to go because they will give you momentary pleasure -- temporary satisfaction -- no question about it! And you can't wait until you get there....

....there are some doors, thank God, through which you enter because once you enter them your life can never again be the same because improvement is setting in....

I would not want to return to this place again if I did not honestly believe that there are some of you who have found a difference for good set in your life because you entered the doors that lead to Saint Luke Church. This I most certainly believe.

Jesus said, "I am the door. By me if any man enter, and go out . . . "

We don't always think about that, do we? Doors lead in....doors lead out. Jesus knows what He wants us to find on the inside, where He is. But He's also giving us to understand that once He's had us for a little while, and when we turn to go out and to face the world -- which we have to face -- you know very well that you can't stay here forever, the time comes when you have to leave, and you go! When you go you ought to go differently because of what you've received here. And that should strengthen you to persevere with patience the course that you have to run beyond these doors.

One of the finest compliments I ever heard paid the people of this parish was paid quite indirectly. A woman became a member of this congregation -- she was separated from the church for some time, and then she came back within the Body of Believers. And she said to me, "You know what, Pastor -- my family says that since I have been coming to Saint Luke Church I am fit to live with at home." What we receive here we receive in vain if it doesn't spill over on the outside once we go through these doors.

Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life"

Jesus said: "No one comes unto the father but by me."

...and then some of us maintain, as Scripture says:

"There is no name under Heaven whereby we can be saved"

....because once we've come to Jesus, once we've seen Him as the door that leads into life and salvation and peace and pardon -- and even to God Himself -- there's no other door that we want to enter, there's no other path that we want to take. And that just because Jesus delivers. He was always talking about what was inside the Kingdom, what was inside the door He wanted us to use. Not everybody delivers once they get us on the inside.

I have been spending some time these days looking back over the last 14 - 15 years in particular. One incident I happen to recall was the day we had "Saint Luke Night At The Circus" - - we rolled down the Baltimore-Washington Parkway -- 600 strong, filling 20 buses. You can never guess why I was excited about going to the circus - because - let me tell you. I had read about old P.T. Barnum, delightful character that he was -- always finding ways to make another dollar.

...he discovered that one of his tents where a side-show was going on, people came and were completely fascinated by what they were seeing, and they just stayed, longer than he thought they ought to stay, and he wasn't selling any more tickets -- and that's where he made his money -- the more tickets he sold the more money he made . . . so he had to devise some way to get those people out of that tent, so they wouldn't stay there as long, with all the crowds milling on the outside.

Clever chap that he was, he put up a sign so that all could see it after they were inside the tent a little while -- the sign that simply said:

THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS

P. T. Barnum's successors in the circus business still have that sign somewhere under the big top.

....now what happened was: these poor benighted people, not knowing what the word meant, thought that on the outside was something far more fascinating than they had already seen, only to discover as they followed THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS -- they were outside! -- and nothing there!

Not so this Jesus! -- who is always saying: "This way -- follow Me!

-- I am the way, and inside my door . . . "

....He was always talking about what was inside.

There are two worlds, you know, as far as Jesus is concerned -- a world outside the Kingdom and a world inside the Kingdom, and He spent all of His energies talking about all the wonderful things they would find inside the door to His Kingdom. He didn't spend much time talking about what was outside -- you need to hear this:

...my mentor in the faith, whose lengthened shadow was cast benignly upon me throughout my formative years, even after I became your Pastor, the man who performed our wedding ceremony and the man who baptized our two boys, the man who followed me throughout the years -- Harvey Daniel Hoover -- a man who taught me what a wonderful thing it is to be a pastor....

-- once related to me when he was supplying a church in Chicago, a nearby undertaker came and said, "We have this woman to bury. Nobody is making arrangements, but I can't think of having this person buried without a preacher conducting the service..."

Dr. Hoover, every inch a pastor, made himself available, and he said,

"But can you tell me a little bit about her?"

"Well," the undertaker said, "You look as though you can understand me -- " (Hoover was quite young in those days)....he said, "She was a woman of the streets, that's what she was, that's the kind of a life she lived . . . you still want to conduct the service?"

"Yes."

And then Dr. Hoover had to decide for himself, what would he say at that service? -- and momentarily, only momentarily, he was tempted to preach about the wrath of God, the torment of the damned, and what Hell is like. And then he caught himself up short -- --

"Why should I preach to these people who might come to that service (he presumed that some of her friends, her customers? -- other women of the streets, they might come) and so he said to himself -- "Why should I preach to them about Hell? They live in it! They already know about Hell!"

...but Jesus-fashion, Harvey Daniel Hoover spoke about the love of God, the kindness of God, the possibility of Heaven. That's what Jesus was always doing while He was here, not spending His energies telling about the evil that they'd already tasted.....

But with a beckoning look -- and a "C'mon this way! -- there's something better inside My Kingdom . . . "

Now remember: a door divides, a door separates.

-- you are either on the inside....or the outside.

Where are you?

I know where you could be . . . and that's a happy thought!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

WHO ARE YOU, JESUS: "BREAD OF LIFE"

John 6:35

Today's sermon is the next-to-the-last in the series on the general theme: Who Are You, Jesus? The text that you are about to hear is expressed repeatedly in the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to John. This now is the way the 35th verse reads:

" . . and Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life."

Who are you, Jesus? The question remains the same. The answer may vary, for He was many things -- basically, Savior of all mankind, but who has come to us.

-- who are you, Jesus? "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life"

-- who are you, Jesus? "I am the door"

-- who are you, Jesus? "I am the light of the world"

-- who are you, Jesus? "I am the good shepherd"

-- who are you, Jesus? "I am the vine"

-- who are you, Jesus? "I am the bread of life"

It's a far cry from when Jesus spoke those words on a Galilean hill-top not far from the Lake of Galilee to a small town on the banks of the Susquehanna River in north central Pennsylvania. We need to talk about both incidents. But first, the one farthest away and longest ago.

Jesus had performed a miracle, the miracle that comes quickest to mind to any Sunday School youngster. Ask him to name the miracles performed by Jesus and in all likelihood the Feeding of the Five Thousand will be the first one that he might name. Jesus had done that, apparently with the snap of the fingers, so it would seem to some people -- five thousand people were fed out of a small supply of bread and fishes that had been handed to Him. The people were absolutely astounded -- who wouldn't have been! And they responded exactly the way you would have responded -- poor, hungry as they were, they said to themselves: "We've got something going for us! -- we hadn't better let this fellow get away!" -- they made up their minds they'd bring pressure to bear and they'd name him their King. Why not? They would be fed -- and there would always be bread on the table -- man's basic need.

Jesus was greatly concerned. Despite the popularity, knowing human nature as

He does, He was fully aware of the fact that they were coming to Him for the wrong reason. They wanted their stomachs to be filled. His greater concern was for their souls. He's the same one who said, "Man does not live by bread alone"...and so while He did feed them bread, He had to get them to shift gears and to think of the bread that does not perish: He had to get them to think in terms of the diet of the soul. He had to get them to think in terms of the ingredients that would provide healthy fare for their minds and their hearts - -

" . . for as a man thinketh, so he becomes . . . "

and " . . out of the heart are the issues of life . . . "

So He had to get away from them. It was too much for Him. Their failure to understand Him as He really is, this intense desire on their part to elevate Him, to to exalt Him, just because He put food on their tables.

So after a little while they caught up with Him, He couldn't escape them forever. And then He had to confront them. In no uncertain way He had to give them to understand that they were following Him for the wrong reason. And with nary a crumb in His hands He said these words: "I am the bread of life."

...you want bread? - - I dare you to think in these terms

"I am the bread of life."

Now let's try to understand it. This metaphor, you see, gets in our way because we've dealt with it so often. And if we don't take heed we won't get beyond the imagery. What do the words really mean? -- ~~six monosyllabic words~~ -- what do they mean: "I am the bread of life." ?

Ask the question: What is bread? Bread is absolutely basic. Without bread, meaning food, we cannot live. I remember it as though it were yesterday, seeing that baby boy brought to his mother, now to see him for the first time since he had been delivered....and he goes so naturally and so instinctively to the breast that she bares. From the day that we're born we reach out for food.

Making hospital calls this past week - - few in number they may be that I make these past days, I still recall vividly that hospital bed with all the gadgetry 'round about it . . . feeding a patient, even though the patient may be terminally ill and even though the patient may be comatose, not conscious at all, there are those who make decisions that this person needs to be sustained, to be fed, until the very moment that that person may breathe his or her last. Say it again and say it often: bread is basic. In the Middle East they refer to bread as the staff of life -- absolutely essential. We reach for it - - we reach for it from the moment we are born, and generally speaking we crave it, all other things being equal, to the time that we die. Without it we cannot live.

But man is more than body. Man is more than a person with a stomach. He's a soul -- who dreams, who feels, who thinks....and knows that when he dies, being put six feet in the ground is not the end -- -- who day by day orders the days of his years with the prospect of something beyond the grave. And to that end his soul needs to be nurtured, nourished.

Now, that Pennsylvania town on the banks of the Susquehanna River in the north and central part of the state -- we lived in that town before we came to you. She lived about six houses away from where we lived. I am terribly embarrassed to tell you, I don't remember her name. When we knew her we had reason to believe that she was comfortably fixed. Her husband had died and left her a fair amount of money. She lived in a very attractive house, a very solid brick house with a slate roof.

Not long after we moved here we got word that she had died. As you might suppose, as you would do, I asked: and what caused her death? I can still hardly believe it -- they said she died from malnutrition.

...now, next door to where we lived, just six doors away from where she lived, was the church. And then right across the street from the church was the grocery store. She could get to that grocery store from her house in less than a minute-and-a-half, or about that. She had only to open the door and to call for the fine youngsters who lived on that street -- you could trust any one of them -- she could have given them money and said, "Go and get me this" . . . she could have lifted the receiver and called Jimmy Shockey, the Italian store-keeper who loved the neighborhood, and his aging father, old Pop, would trip up the street with a basket and deliver it. It was as available as all that!

...but she died from malnutrition. Which is simply to say two things: not enough food, and whatever it was, it wasn't the right kind.

Some decades ago we shocked the whole community when I introduced a physician friend of mine to the service club in which I had membership. When the word got around at the round table where I sat that he was doing something innovative and creative -- this was 40 years ago, they'd never heard of it up there -- he was prescribing vitamins, food supplements for old people. They had never thought in those terms. But people who live alone, who may be disinclined to eat properly, should be guaranteed that they get the basic amount of what they ought to have....

...she didn't have to die of malnutrition -- I've made that plain to you already:

she didn't have to die from malnutrition!

And you know how sensitized we are in this day. When you are inclined to speak ill of the world, remember, we are a people who say there should be bread for the hungry. We do get involved in soup kitchens. We do think in terms of our surpluses and lament the fact that we can't quite get those surpluses out to people who ought to have them. We are sensitized to the fact that bread is basic for everybody and everybody ought to have his share. Really now, really -- we won't quite be as hard as the person who said, "If he won't work he can't eat." We do have a concern for the hungry. Bread is basic.

I remember when I first went to Europe, when I was going to spend two weeks in Sweden -- I had a Swedish friend teach me my basic Swedish:

"yag är hungrig"

...he knew very well before long I'd be hungry. I also knew that there might be somebody who would feed me, so I learned my other Swedish:

"Tack så mycket" . . . "Thank you very much."

When you talk about food you talk about appetite. And some people aren't eating properly because they've lost their appetite. A person goes to a physician -- you know very well how he'll probe and ask questions. You're concerned about your physical well-being? -- eventually he'll ask the question: how is your appetite? ...and he becomes concerned, of course, if you say, "I've lost my appetite." Some people lose their appetite because they eat the wrong kind of food.

Spiritually speaking now, what's the diet for your soul? We're a very diet-conscious generation. Do you have substantial fare for your soul? Is the intake of love and peace and forgiveness sufficient to sustain you? . . . or is your diet one of envy, and jealousy, pride? You can be starved on that kind of thing. You can form a cancer that can eat your very heart away. But a diet of peace and hope, of forgiveness -- that's something else.

When I was a youngster at camp, we had camp for two weeks at Camp Nawakwa, senior high kids went there. I discovered something that I noted then that I wish I could find again in camp life -- by the end of two weeks every youngster seemed to look much better than when he came at the beginning of the two-week period -- physically, now, as well as spiritually. And I think one reason was this: we were under a discipline -- we got up at a certain hour in the morning and we went to bed at a certain hour at night...and we ate only at prescribed times and we ate well-balanced sufficient food. There was no such thing as "junk food" available at Camp Nawakwa.

The camp store was open for about fifteen minutes after lunch, and in those days gone by, the only thing that you could spend was ten cents, and that would buy an ice cream bar, if that's what you wanted, but that was the only kind of food that was ever served or purchased aside from the dining room table.....

...in those grand and glorious -- hear me out -- in those grand and glorious days when the camp truck would go out in the neighborhood and get the greens, the beans from the surrounding farmers, and the fresh corn, and the apple butter that was made in that part -- that's the kind of diet that they had -- well-balanced, strict hours, you ate only at meal-time.....

And at the end of a two-week period you could tell the difference -- none of this sporadic eating.

Oh, I must tell you about my predecessor's widow in the parish where I first served. She was about as severe and stern as he was good and gracious. This goes back to the days when the tramps came along the railroad. One came to her back porch for food -- it happened so frequently in those days -- she fed him.

....weeks later the same tramp came back. And as only she could do it, recognizing him, she said, "I fed you before!"

...and all he could say was, "Yes, lady, and I got hungry again." This is the fundamental weakness for some of us in our spiritual diet. Weeks and months can pass before we show up for the food that we need most in order that our souls might be nourished. You think about that.

I am also thinking that when I go to the hospital and see how they can force-feed people in order to keep them alive. Well, we don't have any such gadgetry, spiritually speaking. I can't force-feed you with a generous portion of love. I can't even force-feed forgiveness into your soul. Even when the pastor raises his hands, pronounces the Absolution, he can't force that on you. It's only as you wish it, and want it, and receive it. Now that's something to think about.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." What He's really saying is "Without me you really can't live." And here and there there are some of us who take Him at His word. And that's why we're willing to face tomorrow. He forgives yesterday. And He holds out before us a measure of confidence so that we can face an unfolding future without fear, even to when we breathe our very last. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS:
FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY" (Luke 15:11-32)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I am not quite certain what first comes to the minds of our two sons when, as boys, they'd go out to be with their grandmother in the country. It could be that they remember very quickly how Grossmudder would reach for that Savory roaster and put in it that beef roast, surrounded with onions, potatoes and carrots, and then bring it in due time steaming hot to the table -- maybe they remember that....

...maybe they remember her homemade apple pie.....

But I'm reasonably certain that both of them recall with utmost of satisfaction how Grossmudder told them stories. She had been a school teacher, you see, and she always placed a high value on those good stories that could be told, and always the stories with a moral.

Which leads me to suggest to you, when you think of Jesus Christ, how do you think of Him? His personality was multi-faceted, no question about that....

-- He came as a preacher -- you may think of Him that way....

-- He came as a miracle-worker -- you think of Him that way....

-- He came as one to recruit people to become His leaders, to carry on His Kingdom when He was no longer here -- you think of Him as one who gathered together His disciples

-- you think of Him addressing throngs of people, five thousand at one time.....you also think of Him, multi-faceted, as sitting down and engaging just one person in meaningful conversation as they tarried at the well in Samaria.....

-- you think of Him preaching that Sermon on the Mount that goes on chapter after chapter in Matthew in particular.....you may also think of Him at the time, this multi-faceted personality, of never so much as saying a single word to a person who had confronted Him and tried to goad Him on to say something.

But what you think of Jesus, and whenever you think of Him, please make room -- think of Him as the story-teller. Again and ever so often, in order to illustrate a basic truth, He wove it into a story.

Everyone loves to hear a story told, no matter what our age, and the child remains in the heart of the adult. Let someone begin in this way: "Now I want to tell you a story - - "...and figuratively speaking, that person has our attention, because so many stories are so different, and they can be told differently. The basis for all that you're going to hear in this sermon now is the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, 32 verses, one entire chapter, consists of three different stories that Jesus told. They had a common theme, but three different stories.

I need to tell you this: each of them begins on a happy note, but in between there is misery, there is despair, there is sadness.

In case you don't quickly recall that 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, let me refresh your memory. It's that chapter in which He tells first the story of a man with a hundred sheep. Now that's exciting! That's a happy note! A hundred sheep could constitute a small fortune for a shepherd in the day of Jesus -- you think of it -- a hundred sheep! That's a happy thought.

...but somewhere in the middle of that story Jesus says that the shepherd had to spend his time and his energy going out and looking for one that was lost....

You may say to yourself, 99% -- one ought to be able to go to sleep and get a good night's sleep with that. But Jesus was talking about a shepherd, with a shepherd's heart, with a concern for anything that might be lost, that wasn't where it belonged, that was out of relationship.

The second story that He told: a woman had ten silver pieces. Let the wheels go in your mind right now as the story is being told -- where do you suppose she got them? Can you tell us, Jesus? Did they come from one lover, two lovers? Were they an inheritance? Tell us more, Jesus.

...alright, says Jesus, you want to hear more? She had ten. That's a happy thought. One day she discovered one was missing, and all of the gladness became sadness as she turned the house upside-down looking for the one that she couldn't find!....

He told a third story.

Notice the progression, if you want to put it that way --

-- one out of a hundred

-- one out of ten

And now the human factor: "There was a man who had two sons . . . "

And as soon as the story-teller says "two sons" you begin to deal in similarities, and dis-similarities -- contrasts and comparisons -- because anyone knows that members of a household are as different from one another as day is from night. But a happy thought -- he had two.

And then He tells how one of them wilfully leaves home, squanders his living in the far country. It isn't so much that he wasted his money. It's the fact that he severed a relationship....

...and the other son? Do I have to tell you this? -- he might just as well have been in the far country, because he too was out of a relationship with his father.

Now Jesus told these stories. You're not forgetting, are you, I said they began on a happy note, they ended on a happy note -- but in between -- this is Jesus, the story-teller, the realist, who tells it as it is. He was not someone to come and gloss over the warts, and the unfortunate, and the ugly, and the untoward. He was a realist. He knew that He lived in a world where these things could happen. And you and I must come to grips with that. It is absolutely possible that one always faces life at some risk. Sooner or later we may have to discover that it never works out as well as we had hoped. Whenever you deal with people, and the freedom of the will, you run the risk of waste, inefficiency, misery. And the one word, the umbrella that embraces all of these, is sinfulness. So Jesus told it as it was.

. . . a great story-teller, who said, "This is the way it is! You can start out beautifully -- in fact that's the story of Creation, that's the story of man, that's your story, that's my story -- we begin in the Garden of Eden, the idyllic thing, a paradise....

Life for man begins on a happy note. Even God was pleased, and He said "Enjoy it! -- Make the most of it! Don't let anything happen to it!" But something did. Life began on a happy note. But you and I also know that it was meant to end on a happy note. For God says, "Even though in the meantime -- all of this meantime -- you may head for Hell, you were not meant for Hell." And even though the son may run away and go into the far country, you can only run so far! For man is stamped in the image of God, and man was made to come to himself. Man was meant to regain his senses, not to lose it forever. That's the story of the Prodigal Son, that marvelous statement, when in the far country "He came to himself"...

...which is simply one way of saying, "It occurred to him
who he was, and whose he was."

...and that relationship could be re-established. That's the way Jesus told it.

There's a lot of Hell in between, but mankind wasn't meant to go to Hell. There is such a thing, says Jesus Christ, as restoration, as renewal, as redemption, as reconciliation - - that's the story! Jesus was the master story-teller. He told it as He saw it. But He also told it as it could be. He kept saying to us, this is the way it is, but it doesn't have to be that way! There can be a happy ending.

Now all of this leads me to bring to your attention - - this is another in the series of sermons on the general theme of "Favorite Texts of Famous Persons" - - and the man to whom we pay tribute this morning, the Russian, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, both in 1821, died sixty years later - - one of the greatest story-tellers of all time. And significantly enough, his favorite Bible passage was this 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, consisting of a marvelous story that Jesus told about the prodigal and the far country. For Dostoyevsky himself on more than one occasion had found himself in the far country, and knew that he didn't belong there. And many of his novels reflect the kind of person who is found in the far country -- "Crime and Punishment" . . . "The Idiot" . . . "The Possessed" . . . "The Brothers Karamazov" - - - the theme is there again and ever so often; the wisdom of life and the emotions of the soul.

I should tell you this: when it came time for him to get formal academic training he studied engineering and the military. And then in his early 20's he dabbled in politics, he became enamored by some new thoughts of a political trend that came out of France. Russia feared Western influence, and he and about twenty others were indicted, they were sentenced to die. Now hear me - - they were brought to the place where they were stood up before the firing squad. Before the blind-folds were put over their eyes, they could see the caskets over in the corner in which their dead bodies would be placed. It was as traumatic as all of this. Then they were lined up: "Ready!" "Aim!" . . . then the Commander said, "Don't fire."

-- the sentence was commuted, they would not be killed,

but they'd be sent off to Siberia to prison camp.

Dostoyevsky never got over the trauma of being that close to death, or figuratively speaking, as being that far into the far country. While he was in prison -- listen to this, just to show you how God works! - - two women, nobly intentioned, came with Bibles in their hands and they slipped into Fyodor Dostoyevsky's hands surreptitiously a copy of the New Testament -- and whispered, "Read it! -- every page." As soon as he had opportunity he turned the pages. And when he came upon some money that was secreted there he thought, this is why they said, Read every page. But - - imprisoned as he was, it was his only reading material, and he read it with a terrific appetite. And the chapter that meant most to him was the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. For when he looked around and saw all the other people

who were imprisoned with him, the flotsam and the jetsum of humanity, he looked upon them as citizens from the far country, and he led himself to believe they were not meant to be there! He looked upon them as extraordinary people who were meant to be somewhere else.

When he died -- listen to this -- forty thousand people walked behind his coffin to the church yard, so great was his influence in his day. The great storyteller, who also told it as it was, but not without some measure of hope. He talked about the far country....but he also talked in glowing terms about home.

Now as I am about to walk away from this sacred desk I must tell you that when I was a student in the Seminary at Gettysburg, one of my professors was Dr. Raymond Thomas Staub, the most intellectual of all the professors that I've ever had. He was gifted, he could take a sublime truth and clothe it in very simple terms. As God gives me memory, to the day I die I'll want to recall how he began a sermon on the Prodigal Son. He began in this manner -- you listen carefully, as I did --

" . . . My sermon this morning," said he, "consists of four points."

(remember now, he's preaching on the Prodigal Son)

"Point Number One: Home.

Point Number Two: Sick of Home.

Point Number Three: Homesick.

Point Number Four: Home. "

That's the only story worth telling -- realistically, and always with a note of reconciliation, redemption, the Gospel of Hope.

I wouldn't want to live another day if I couldn't believe it, totally aware of the fact that the older I become the more I'm constrained to believe that the worst chapter in my life could yet be written -- that's always a possibility. Ask anyone who's growing older. As poignant as any letter that I've read in recent days came to me yesterday, from a grand old an who just two weeks ago celebrated his 86th birthday. And in that letter he pours out himself to his younger friend, "Raymond, they've taken away the keys to my car. I can't drive any more. Raymond, I read Saint Luke MESSENGER every week, I'd like to send you a check to help cover the cost, but I can't write a check. Someone else has power of attorney" -- at 85 years of age! It happened, and maybe it had to happen. But God bless him, he ends on a very positive note:

"I think of you often, and you're always in my prayers."

* * *

May the peace of God that passes all understanding
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

(transcribed as recorded)

"WHEN IS A HOME CHRISTIAN?"
(Luke 2:41-52)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There is only one passage of Scripture that comes soonest to mind as I stand at the sacred desk on this day which we observe as the Festival of the Christian Home. You need to hear it read, the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, it begins with the 41st verse:

"Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the
feast of the Passover

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to
Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they re-
turned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem,
and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

But they, supposing him to have been in the company,
went a day's journey; and they sought him among their
kinfolk and acquaintance.

And when they found him not, they turned back again
to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that after three days they
found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the
doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

And all that heard him were astonished at his under-
standing and answers.

And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his
mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt
with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee
sorrowing.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me?
wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

And they understood not the saying which he spake
unto them.

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and
was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these
sayings in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in
favor with God and man.

I suppose if I were a modern-day psychologist I would tell you this morning that Mary had a problem child on her hands. How else can you explain that? Here He was at twelve years of age, He disappears out of sight, and when they find Him after three days, even though her heart may be filled with joy that she found her

where she did, He simply gives her an answer that she doesn't quite understand, and she never was able to quite understand everything that He said, and everything that He did. But she kept them in her heart -- which is simply to say, she did a great deal of praying. That's how you understand those words --

"She pondered them in her heart."

But I'm not a modern-day psychologist. Do I have to further introduce myself to you? If that should be necessary, let me tell you who I am.

-- I am a father.

-- I am a father-in-law.

-- I am a grandfather.

-- I am the son of my mother and of my father.

-- I am a pastor. By the grace of God I have been listening in on human hearts for more than four decades....I have been with people in various conditions and circumstances. I have been with them when they are good, I have been with them when they are bad. I have been with them when their joy has been exceedingly precious....I have been with them when they have been at their very, very best, and I have been with people when I've seen them teetering on the very brink of Hell.....

I have not come to sit in judgment on anyone. I stand among you as a pastor, and as a child of God.

The question that needs to be asked today, then, as I stand with you in this way, bringing to bear all that I am: When is a home Christian? Hard to tell, really. For when is a person Christian? Just having your name on a church roll doesn't make you Christian. Just being baptized doesn't make you a Christian. Hard to tell sometimes when a person is really Christian.

When is a home really Christian? -- hard to tell. One thing we know for certain, just by hanging one of those old-fashioned framed mottoes on the wall won't do it, I could tell you that from experience, of course I can. When Winifred and I were first married, in an antique shop we found it -- they used to grace all of those Christian homes decades ago. We placed it there in the dining room in the three parsonages in which we have been privileged to live in our years together. It's that antique frame within which those words are fashioned and cut out of cardboard -- delicately done, I dare say -- you'd be pleased with it. It reads like

this: "Christ is the Head of This House,
 The unseen Guest at Every Meal,
 The Silent Listener to Every Conversation"

And even up in the country we have had hanging for years a similar one, framed metal, that reads, a quotation from Joshua:

"As for me and my house,
We will serve the Lord."

But with all the strength that I can command this morning, I have to tell you, it takes more than beautifully framed words to make a home Christian. But there are yard-sticks that we can use. There are measuring rods.

Yesterday we had three weddings in Saint Luke. I still hear ringing in my ears the prayer by which we concluded the last of the three weddings, a prayer that's been incorporated in the order that we use here in Saint Luke. Let me read it for you.

...the couple has just been married, they've made their promises, they have been pronounced husband and wife in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Then we pray:

"O GOD, our dwelling-place in all generations:
Look with favor upon the homes of our land; enfold husbands and wives, parents and children, in the bonds of your pure love; and so bless our homes, that they may be a shelter for the defenseless, a bulwark for the tempted, a resting-place for the weary, and a foretaste of our eternal home in you; . . ."

When I die and go to Heaven, and I believe that I will -- not by any saving grace of my own, but because of my fervent trust in Jesus Christ -- I should like very much to meet in Heaven the person who wrote these lines -- a perfectly beautiful prayer, because here in these words, whoever first wrote them gives us some idea of what God had in mind when He had the family in mind, that within a home there ought to be a possibility of the reflection of Heaven. That's exactly from the Christian perspective -- what a home is meant to be: a chance to reflect a bit of Heaven.

But I am fully aware of it, you know that I am, that any number of you could stand right up, right now, and interrupt me. And if you wanted to, you could say without any hesitation, and with all the anguish that we would quickly sense: -- "I've lived in hell! For what I've experienced within the confines of my family life have been a far cry from Heaven." . . . I am fully aware of that.

But I also know it wasn't meant to be that way. And I also know that I cannot allow myself to be crippled by the fact that it happens that way more often than we would care to accept, ever admit.

We take for our prototype within the Christian church that home in Nazareth. It's done so handsomely -- Mary's problem child -- what happened to Him? . . (and I say that advisedly) . . what happened to Him? He went down to Nazareth -- He went home where He belonged. And He was subject to His parents.

-- when is a home Christian?

...a home is Christian when there's the kind of authority that commands respect

And that's exactly what He had in that home in Nazareth.

You ask me what that home in Nazareth was like -- I could spend a half-hour telling you all the things that that home in Nazareth did not have....

-- it didn't have running water

-- it didn't have electricity

-- it didn't have a bathroom

-- it didn't have three rooms, it didn't have a two-car garage

-- it didn't have television, it didn't have a radio, it didn't have a micro-wave oven

-- it didn't have rugs on the floor, it didn't have a dish-washer, it didn't have a clothes-washer.....

Name all the modern gadgetry, it didn't have a single one of them. But what that home did have was a couple of people who together commanded respect in the eyes of their children. And this child was subject to those parents.

And hear this tremendous truth -- how do you translate it -- freely -- recklessly -- the net result of what happened in that home in Nazareth:

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man . . ."

That's simply to say, -- He grew up! And He grew up the way He was meant to grow up. And He was able to grow because that home in Nazareth provided the environment. What is essential for growth? You can't have growth without the proper environment. Mary and Joseph, fortunately, were able to provide that environment -- together.

No matter how you read that text: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature -- --" -- increased -- that means He matured, that means there was growth -- perceptible growth, from one level to another -- ". . in favor with God, and with man."

As a Pastor, when a couple come to be married, I remind myself I'm a Pastor, I'm not just a marrying parson, so I don't simply say,

"When do you want to be married? -- let me see if

I can fit it into our calendar -- fine! You come,

we'll perform the ceremony . . . " ah, no.

You come for an interview, as any number of you people right now, within the hearing of my voice can attest. You may fault me for this -- I don't have them come back for 6, 8, 10 interviews, but I don't speak disparagingly of those who do. But I make much of the quality of the experience of the time that we spend together in the initial interview -- because I make certain that I ask the correct questions. And how we may have to deal with those questions from that point on may have a different story....but I'm in duty bound to ask those important questions, and they're always four in number:

- 1 - Why do you want to be married?
- 2 - Why do you think your marriage will succeed?
- 3 - How do you feel about children?
- 4 - Where does the church figure in the future as far as
your relationship together is concerned?

I have little patience with people who sit down as therapists or interrogists, who only ask questions. I would never want to go to a physician if all he did was ask me: "Where does it hurt?....how long have you been sick?....when do you think you got this problem?" From the Christian perspective there is more than simply asking questions. If a Christian is worth the name of what he represents, he's in duty bound to help people get at the right answer. And I've discovered this to be true, because any number of people, God bless them, embarrassed, awkward as they may be in relating to the Pastor in this moment -- I don't mind telling you -- I do my best to help them come up with the right answers. So when they say, as I ask them, "Why do you want to be married?" -- "We're in love" . . . do you think for a single minute I let them stop at that point? I say,

"What do you mean by love?"

From the Christian perspective, to love a person is to meet the need of that person, not just to be swept off romantically.

Let it be said and said repeatedly, the big thing in marriage is not romance. And don't you think for a single minute that I don't want Winifred to be as attractive as possible! -- don't you think for a single minute that I don't like soft music and candlelight! I am an incurable romanticist. But the big thing is not romance -- -- fidelity!...honor!....commitment! When through the Christian perspective you say you love, that means "I will meet your need."

I have said it on more than one occasion as two people stand in front of me --

" . . . there may be days when one of you will be weak,
there may be days when one of you will be strong, but
you will never have a day when you won't need each other."

The second question: Why do you think your marriage will succeed?

Listen to me now -- no matter how they come up to answer, I always have to say to that one, "Come now, the only real answer to that question is 'We don't know.'" None of us knows if we're going to make it. We're human. We're stained by original sin, and marriage is not made up of two perfect people -- marriage is made up of two imperfect people. So as they answer that question I have to help them answer in the correct way! We don't know if it's going to succeed. And then I stick with them and I say, "But will you want it to succeed? -- and will you recognize the fact that it can't succeed on its own, you need the help of God?

...that's why we've written into our marriage service that
we use here in Saint Luke Church -- you don't simply say,
"I do" but you answer, "I will, by God's help."

None of us can handle it by ourselves. We know that, and we need to admit it.

I can't take time to talk with you now about why I feel that the question about children is so important, or why I feel that the relationship to the church is so important, because I only know that even marriage needs the correct environment in which to grow, and we get that environment through the church, which is God's bigger family.

I want to do something that I've never done before, I want to read for you somebody else's sermon as I conclude this sermon. I heard it myself, and I was deeply moved. I wasn't there, but it was televised, on the 29th day of July, 1981, from a place, when I go to London, I always want to visit, the majestic cathedral of St. Paul. The occasion: the wedding of a prince and a princess.

Winifred and I have a very dear friend who visited St. Paul's not too long after this wedding. She was the only person in St. Paul's at the particular time and she tripped merrily down the aisle, as though she were Diana....the bride that remains in every woman's heart can understand that. This is the sermon:

"Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made, the
Prince and the Princess on their wedding day. But fairy
tales usually end at this point with the simple phrase:

'They lived happily ever after.'

...this may be because fairy stories regard marriage as

an anti-climax, after the romance of courtship. This is not the Christian view. Our faith sees the wedding day not as a place of arrival, but the place where the adventure really begins . . . "

(you're not forgetting -- I am interposing this now -- you're not forgetting what appears in "Pages in a Diary" in this issue of Saint Luke MESSENGER, are you? -- the words of the old rabbi: "Love is the result of marriage, and not the cause of it.")

" . . . There is an ancient Christian tradition that every bride and groom on their wedding day are regarded as a royal couple. To this day in the marriage service of the Eastern Orthodox Church crowns are held over the man and the woman to express a conviction that as husband and wife they are the kings and queens of Christ. As it says of humankind in the Bible, 'Thou crownest him with glory and honor and didst set him over the works of thy hands.'

On a wedding day is made clear that God does not intend us to be puppets, but chooses to work through us, and especially through our marriages to create the future of His world.

Marriage is first of all a new creation for the partners themselves. As husband and wife live out their vows, loving and cherishing one another, sharing life's splendors and miseries, adjustments and set-backs, they will be transformed in the process. A good marriage is a life, as the poet Edwin Muir says, 'where each must ask from each what each most wants to give, and each awaits in each what else would never be.' But any marriage which is turned in upon itself, in which the bride and groom simply gaze obsessively at one another, goes sour after a time. A marriage which really works is one which works for others. Marriage has both a private place and a public importance. If we solve all our economic problems and fail to build loving families, it would profit us nothing, because the family is the place where the future is created, good and full of love.....or deformed.

" . . . Those who are married and live happily ever after the wedding day -- if they persevere in the real adventure which is the royal task of creating each other and creating a more loving world. That is true of every man and woman undertaking marriage. It must be especially true of this marriage in which are placed so many hopes.

Much of the world is in the grip of hopelessness. Many people seem to have surrendered to a fatalism about the so-called inevitability of life -- cruelty, injustice, poverty, bigotry and war, and seem to have accepted the cynical view of marriage itself. But all couples on their wedding day are royal couples, and stand to the truth that we help shape this world and are not just its victims. All of us are given the power to make the future more in God's image and to be kings and queens of love.

This is our prayer for Charles and Diana: May the burdens we lay upon them be matched by the love with which we support them in the years to come. And however long they live, may they ever know that when they pledged themselves to each other before the altar of God, they were surrounded and supported not by mere spectators, but by the sincere affection and the active power of prayer of millions of friends. Thanks be to God. . . . "

That's the note on which I end. Not every marriage is going to end perfectly, but wherever there is a couple who started out, we need to offer them our love and our prayers. And as Mary, the mother of our Lord - she never gave up praying. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE SET OF THE SOUL"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I would indeed be less than honest if I did not tell you that my heart was filled with joy when the decision was made that I could have the privilege of standing at this sacred desk for this particular service. My heart was gladdened for any one of a number of reasons, for the preaching of the Confirmation Sermon this year is very special to me.

If it's a title that you want for the sermon, here it is: "The Set Of The Soul" - - and the text, already chosen by a member of the Confirmation Class as one that could be very special to him all the days of his years: the 10th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Book of the Revelation:

"... Be thou faithful unto death, and
I will give you a crown of life . . "

Do you remember how it is in Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Carousel"? -- the young man and young woman day-dream about how wonderful their life could be together, in the lyrics which they sing comes this line: "When today is a long time ago" - - so lovers think of the passing of the years, and always dream of even brighter and better days yet to come. The future does unfold - - and every day, every day - - has a tomorrow.

But what also needs to be remembered is that every day has a yesterday. Mary Ann Shepherd, a daughter of a parsonage, in appreciation for her years here at Saint Luke, once gave us a sampler which now hangs on the wall in one of the rooms at the parsonage at 919 Highland Drive. It reads like this:

ALL THE FLOWERS OF ALL THE TOMORROWS
ARE IN THE SEEDS OF TODAY

....which is simply to suggest that today determines tomorrow, all other things being equal.

I am always troubled when I read some verses of Scripture. Some gladden my heart....some sadden my heart. I've never been that happy when I've come upon

this verse that refers to a person who ended his relationship with Jesus Christ by this reference:

"... he went to his own place . . ."

It wasn't a very complimentary reference to that man, for that man was one of the Twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot.

Each of us has his own eccentricities, of course one does. One of my eccentricities that I confess to you in this moment is being a bit uncomfortable when I find myself in the presence, not of 13 people, but of 12. I've never been hung-up on that "13" business. But when I find myself numbered as the 12th person, I do a great deal of soul-searching....because I do remember how one out of Twelve, as far as the Master was concerned, ended up.

I'm eternally grateful in the years I have been able to spend with you that when I approach the altar I'm constantly confronted by twelve figures carved into oak: the Master and His men -- disciples whom He had chosen, just as you are being chosen. Your number has been considerably greater -- He had to get along with far fewer in number than what we are able to get along with here in Saint Luke -- He had only twelve. But among the twelve there is one who is dismissed as far as Scripture is concerned -- the only reference that remains to be made of him after he had finished his course:

" . . . he went to his own place . . ."

What shall we make of this way of putting it? Are we to believe that in the final analysis each one of us ends up very much where he wants most to be? --

- do we really chart our own course?
- do we really set our own sail?
- do we really determine our own fate?

We've made much of this as far as you are concerned, members of this year's Confirmation Class. At the very beginning, when we met with you this year we gave you to understand that you would not have to be confirmed -- you could make the choice not to be confirmed. But we did say: if you chose to be confirmed you would make that decision on your own. There were those of us who were hoping and praying how the decision would come out, and we were surrounded by your loved ones, your family and your friends and all who have nurtured you in the faith -- there was no question how we hoped you would answer. But we could not answer for you. To all intents and purposes there comes a moment, which is followed by other moments,

when a person sets his course and determines the way he will go.

A wise man once observed that there is a principle here which works in our lives. We do go, each one to his own place -- we find our own level according to the secret desire or motivation which is in our hearts. We gather around us the people with whom we want to be....we find friends who are one-with-us in spirit . .

...we read the books that we want to read

...and if at all possible, we go to the places

where we want to go

...we turn the channel on the television set to the
program we want to see.....

It can be said we make our own world, it can be simply put in that manner.

Still as of old, each one goes to his own place.

-- one may seek for money - one may seek for pleasure

-- one may desire to serve his fellow-men -

one may decide to exploit them

-- one may decide to make the most of what life will give -

one may decide to be victimized by circumstances.....

Oliver Wendell Holmes, bless his soul, compares the course of two rivers -- they rise in the same mountain-side, but they flow in different directions, until a whole continent divides them by the waters. So people take their different ways in life according to the set of their souls. The poet put it this way:

"From the same cradle-side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to the lone darkness and frozen tide,
One to the placid sea . . "

That sounds, wouldn't you say, as though we pretty much determine the circumstances in which we eventually find ourselves? It's an awesome fact, to say the least.

It could be, my friend, that no matter where you may be right now, look carefully -- you're probably there amid the circumstances that surround you because at one time or another you either chose to head in that direction, or you allowed yourself to drift. You are where you are because you allowed yourself to drift in that direction, or you made the terrible decision that that's where you wanted to be.

For those of you who are familiar with the Southwest, there's a road marker.

The upright post has two arms on it. Try to visualize it now - -

-- the one side says ALBUQUERQUE

-- the other side points: LOS ANGELES

....and at that particular point the traveler has to make a decision: you'll either end up in Los Angeles.....or you'll end up in Albuquerque. And if you're not sure where you might want to go you might even flip a coin to decide in which direction you're going to travel - - - but even the flipping of the coin does not allow you to escape from the element of responsibility. You can't have it both ways -- you can't be in Albuquerque and Los Angeles at the same time! It's one...or the other. And there's always the element of responsibility in the making of the choices which cannot be escaped.

I have little patience with so-called therapeutic measures which are always trying to excuse people from the element of responsibility. God endowed us with the capability of making a choice. A man or a woman is never as much as a man or a woman is meant to be aside from the fact that when he or she brings honor and glory to God in loving and serving Him -- as when he exercises the freedom to do so. God did not make you as puppets, to pull a string and to have you say, "Yes, Master....No, Master" - - He made you that out of your free will you could set the course. And He offered you that opportunity because He loved you.

What may be true in the realm of circumstance can be true very much as far as character is concerned: we become what we are according to our hearts - -

"Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life."

What we secretly desire is that we become. And brace yourself for this: generally speaking, life has a way of giving us what we really want....if not by actual condition, then certainly by fashioning the character that seeks such things.

I am numbered among those who lament the fact that what has passed from the public school scene in many areas is the memorization of poetry that inculcated in the minds of those who are young essential values of spiritual truth. Some of us remember when we were in school, how the requirement was that each month we memorize a given poem that was naturally very carefully chosen, that it might inculcate in us at the impressionable age of life ideals, basic principles of morality and virtue. To my dying day I shall remember how I was required to memorize, among other things, "Be loyal to the royal that is within you."

...we introduced into our curricula body-building courses because we earnestly believed that American manhood should be physically fit....

Just as important, if not even more so, I suggest to you, is that we introduce those things that enable us to become spiritually and morally fit. Polonius says to his son, doesn't he, in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" - - "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." And periodically a person must take himself or herself to task to ask the question: What kind of person am I becoming?

In what direction am I heading?

Tomorrow does come. And tomorrow is fashioned out of the stuff of today, which is the yesterday that eventually looms upon the horizon.

Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if all that we had to say today was that there was one out of twelve who "went to his own place"? -- separated forever from all the others - - - why should I allow myself to be crippled by thinking of that one? Why shouldn't I also think of the eleven? -- the eleven who made it! -- the eleven who proved the point that Jesus had in mind: "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" . . . and every single one of the eleven received the crown of life! It's possible! Eleven out of twelve made it, and they made it because they remembered the promise of their Lord:

"I will go with you"

..."I will never leave you"

...Lo, I will always be with you"

..."My peace I will give to you"

....there's this precious side of the coin that could be ignored, the glorious side of the coin: a person can choose to go to Heaven.

"To every man there openeth a way, and ways, and a way.

And the high soul climbs the high way,
and the low soul gropes the low;
But in between, in the misty flats
The rest drift to and fro.

But to every man there openeth a high way and a low,
And each man decides the way his soul shall go."

And you can end up at Heaven's gate...

John Henry Newman said, "God has created me to do Him some definite service. He's committed some work to me which He has not committed to anybody else. I have my mission. I am a link in a chain, a bond of character between persons. He has not created me for nought. I shall do good, I shall do His work."

Somewhere along the line Judas Iscariot forgot to talk to himself in that way. The eleven did. And as the eleven remembered it, they ended up at the Gate of Heaven, where a crown of light was awaiting them.

Come now, what do you think is the most important single question that a man can put to himself? It's not a question, mark you, that you are supposed to apply for the moment to somebody else. Most of us are quite good at putting questions to other people. But the real test of character may lie in the questions we ask ourselves, and the answers we give. Of all such questions, I suggest to you now, the most important is this: What is the secret longing of my heart?

What do I want most from life?

That's why we've deliberately written into the Order for Confirmation what you're about to experience, when the question is put to you:

"Do you love the Lord Jesus,
and do you promise to serve
Him with all your heart?"

And the answer that you give is:

"Yes, by the help of God."

In my study, so close to the very place where I am standing now, I have a little white card on my desk. It refers to the day when I was ordained a Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It says something like this:

"Keep this vestment spotless unto the Day of Judgment."

I can't keep my vestment spotless, I live in a world where there's always the possibility of my tripping myself up, and my getting it soiled. And that I have already done on more than one occasion. Jesus Christ does not ask us to be perfect - - He asks us to be faithful. And to that end He will help you day after day after day, as long as you set your soul in His direction....

-- and that's the power that lies within you:

to keep your eye on Jesus Christ.

....and when you keep your eye on Jesus Christ, you'll

end up where Jesus Christ is. And that's a happy thought!

This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

May the Peace of God that passeth
all understanding keep your hearts
and minds through Christ Jesus.

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FAVORITE TEXTS OF FAMOUS PERSONS:
BLAISE PASCAL" (Jeremiah 2:13)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

For a number of weeks and months now some of you are fairly aware of the fact that the sermons for the most part being preached from this pulpit have been on the general theme: "Favorite Texts of Famous Persons." This is the next to the last in that series of sermons.

I'm in duty bound to remind you what I have already told you, that there are those who when they think of their commitment to Jesus Christ, invariably think of a particular verse of Scripture. Biblical truth is meant to be applicable in our lives, to become a dominating force. Biblical truth is God's Word to us. Biblical truth is God's revelation of Himself to us. And God wants it to make an impact. God wants it to be a motivating force in our lives. God wants it to determine the course that we may take throughout the days of our years. There is nothing quite like Scriptural truth coming to life within the soul of a person.

Tradition has it -- it is only a legend, of course, that in Heaven above there is a Keeper-of-The-Book, and that Book, as you might know, of course, is the Bible. It is a large volume with wide margins...

...and according to the legend, whenever a person is converted, whenever there's a complete change of heart, whenever there is final and complete realization that a person knows who he is and whose he is -- that he's a child of God and belongs to God -- when he knows that Jesus Christ is his Lord and Saviour...when that experience sets in a person's life, according to tradition...
...in the wide margins of the Book being kept by the Keeper in Heaven above -- that person's name is recorded, and recorded opposite that verse of Scripture which has been instrumental in changing that person's life.

Which leads me to ask very earnestly the question of you: as your life is being changed -- as the reality of your relationship with God is being made firm -- can you associate it with any particular thing? - with any particular place? - with any particular person? - with any particular reference in Scripture?

Last Lord's Day during that impressive Confirmation Service we reminded ourselves that there is such a thing as a Confirmation Verse. Hopefully those who have Confirmation Verses will on occasion reflect on that Biblical truth. This morning now, I want to talk to you a little bit about a man named PASCAL -- said by many who are in a position to make such a judgment that he was the greatest thinker of the 17th Century, whose influence remains to this very day....

- - he's to be remembered as a scientist....
- - he's to be remembered as a writer....
- - he's to be remembered as a logician, a philosopher of no small value....

I can't give you too much pertinent data regarding his life. I can tell you this: that he had a father who was tremendously interested in him, and paid attention to him as a person. His father, perhaps, was as strong an influence on his life as any single person.

In those days, back in the 17th Century, when we didn't have the academic training as we have now, every now and then this person or that person would take it upon himself or herself to educate someone. In this case it was Pascal's father who assumed the responsibility of educating his son. Incidentally -- that word educate comes from the Latin -- which means "to lead out" -- to challenge, to stimulate what may be in front of you. And that Pascal's father did superbly. They did not always agree, but he was instrumental in encouraging his son to think, to develop the fulness of his potential.

Of significance to us this morning is the text that dominated his life....only, of course, after he came to grips with it. Let me read it for you now, from the Book of Jeremiah, that reluctant prophet, the second chapter, the 13th verse:

"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

Now, bear with me for just a little while, while we deal specifically with this text. Then we'll come back and talk about the way it's related to Pascal and changed his life.

I don't know how important water is for you. I know very well that the old adage remains: You never miss the water until the well runs dry. Winifred and I had a visitor from India before I went to India on special assignment a number of years ago, who when she was a guest in our home, Winifred allowed the water to run freely from the tap. She became completely unsettled -- she couldn't believe this apparent waste of

something that was as precious to her as she remembered what it was in India....

...I remember what it was like in India -- on certain days, the last time Pastor David and I were there on special assignment, we had water only certain hours of the day.

...once when Winifred and I made that trip around the world and we were in Hong Kong, water every other day, for only a limited amount of time....

...when I first went to Europe, circumstances were such that for one day -- a 24-hour period -- I was without any water at all....

I remember the days of World War II, there was a tall, lanky physician in my home town who was drafted by the military, and off he went. And when he came back, he had been stationed on Ascension Island, and he told me of the scarcity of water -- good water -- he was rationed only as much water as his helmit could hold, to last three days -- water for all purposes.

In many parts of the Middle East, and what we refer to as the Holy Land in particular, water is an exceedingly precious thing, and pure water above all else. Jeremiah is talking about God as the source of living water, a pure fountain, absolutely essential for one's existence. And then as Jeremiah thinks of the people to whom God had shown special favor, how in their history they failed to take advantage of what God was giving them so freely, and what they needed so essentially, and in their stupidity -- in their apostasy, in their unfaithfulness - - - Jeremiah says they were hewing out for themselves cisterns that could not hold water, that would eventually crack, and the water itself would be polluted . . . while all the time God was making available for them a source of pure and living water - - that's Jeremiah, 13th verse, 2nd chapter.

Now...back to our friend Pascal. At 31 years of age he was converted. At 31 years of age -- well, let me give you some of the details, you may find them of interest.

....it is late at night, one night in particular -- if it's a date you want, here it is: November 23, the year 1654...the time: 10:30 at night, and the encounter took place until 12:30 in the morning....

That's the way it was when a 31-year old man had a conversion experience. He was Pascal, the thinker, unsurpassed in brilliance and audacity....

-- he was Pastal, the scientist, who knew how to harness the most profound erudition to the most practical ends....

-- he was Pascal, the writer, who can express the most abstruse ideas in language a little child can understand....

Those in a position to say so have maintained that no one in his generation influenced civilization as much as this man did -- even to this very day -- would you believe me, and I have reason to tell you this, that even modern technology with its computers can trace itself back to the work of Pascal, who gave us the calculator. His work with fluids still determines much that's being done in physics and chemistry today....

-- in some theological seminaries what he wrote about deep reflective thought is happily made required reading.....

On that night in November 23, 1654 he had an encounter with God. And the net result was, it occurred to him in no uncertain way that he was not drawing strength from the real source in life -- he was not drinking, if you please, from the living fountain. His relationship with God was less than desirable. He was not drawing the full benefit of what God could give to him. He was so impressed by that experience that night that he wrote on parchment and stitched it into the clothing that he wore, this verse of Scripture, so that he might never forget this encounter.

Several reflections now, if you don't mind.

Every now and then you and I have our time when reality sets in, and we see ourselves as we are and have been, and could be! And we have some measure of peace with ourselves. That's precisely what Pascal had on that night from 10:30 until 12:30, November 23, 1654 -- an encounter with God. He never wanted to forget it.

With all the strength that my soul can command I'd like to suggest to you that it is possible for us to have these moments of reality, exceedingly precious moments before God. And human as we are, we need to keep in front of us some kind of a reminder, lest we lose the value that's properly placed upon that encounter and upon that experience. Give Pascal credit -- he didn't want to lose it, and he knew that he had to remind himself that it did happen.

Why do some of us keep coming back to this place Sunday after Sunday? We need to be reminded of what takes place when we find ourselves within the gathered company. We need to hear the echo down the corridors of time of the eternal voice that speaks to the present moment. That's why we come here.

As an impressionable teenager I remember, and remember so well, going into Upper Temple at Nawakwa, where the first speaker that I heard said to us very clearly and succinctly, "I come here to be made aware of God because it's so easy to forget Him when I'm somewhere else."

I delight in reminding you of that old story of the old man who night after night after night walked the streets of Jericho until he came to a sycamore tree.....

and he stood there under that sycamore tree in deep thought. There were people naturally observed him, it was just like clock-work -- night after night after night he came, the old man standing under the sycamore tree....

...who was it made bold to put the question to him that inevitably had to be asked, so curious are we,

"Old man, I see you coming back here night after night to this very spot as you stand under the sycamore tree. Who are you? Why do you come here?"

...the answer:

"My name is Zacchaeus. It was here that I encountered my Lord, and I come back to remind myself of what it was like . . ."

...as much as to say, "to remind myself of who I am and whose I am."

Pascal wrote on a piece of parchment, November 23, 1654 -- 10:30 at night until 12:30 in the morning:

"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

From November 23, 1654 Pascal gave his life as completely as he could to Jesus Christ -- wholeheartedly. He lived only eight more years. He died at the age of 39.

Naturally you know I'm saying to myself, what a pity that for only a fifth of his life he took God seriously, and drew to his own life the benefit of all that God wants to give -- pure and living water is being made available to us. Let me be as old-fashioned as I can be in the preaching of this sermon -- bring all the chords of the old-fashioned evangelist. Why do we tarry? Why do we delay? -- when what we need most is always there.

The old Westminster Catechism of the Presbyterian Church . . . you know what the catechism is, of course, a series of questions and short answers directed as precisely as they can to the question that's put honestly . . . the very first question in the old Westminster Catechism of the Presbyterian Church:

"What is the chief end of man?"

....which is simply to ask, why is man here?

what's his purpose for existence?

The answer is given superbly --

"The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever"

...to make the most of it in a gratifying and a happy way.

I too have it on parchment in my study, just steps away from where I am standing - - my favorite text:

" . . . So naturally we proclaim Christ. We teach every man we can . . . "

and the text goes on --

" . . . hopefully that we might bring every man up to his full maturity in Jesus Christ. This is what I am doing all the time with all the strength that God gives me . . . "

And I honestly believe that we're always less than what we're meant to be until we get squared off with God, until our lives are guided and motivated and strengthened, and dominated by God.

Pascal had that happen for eight years, only a fraction of his life, one-fifth of it. The tragedy is that for any number of people it's not even a fifth. Oh, I know there's always the possibility of a person turning to God and allowing God to take over - - always the possibility, even to the last hour....as is true for the dying thief upon the cross, and the promise of Paradise was his. The tragedy is this: up to that point his was a life without God. And it doesn't have to be that way.

Scriptural truth remains:

"I will never leave you -- I will never forsake you.

Lo, I am with you always."

Take Him at His word. Draw strength of the living fountain.

This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

May the peace of God that passeth
all understanding keep your hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

(Transcribed as recorded)

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"TO PRAY ARIGHT"
(Romans 8:26-27)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

You know very well that I wouldn't want to embarrass you, rest assured I won't do it. But I could do it. Suppose I were to ask you: There were three Lessons read this morning by Suzanne, according to custom. The second Lesson consisted of only two verses. I won't even ask you what they were, but I could be tempted (but relax, I won't) -- I could be tempted to ask you:

-- what did those two verses mean?

-- what was said in those two verses?

They're from that marvelous 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, verses 26 and 27. I'd be less than honest if I didn't tell you that in anticipation of standing at this particular at this sacred desk I have been asking myself every time I sit down to work on this sermon: What shall I make of these two verses?

-- what is the writer really trying to say to us?

...and if by the grace of God I can interpret these verses under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to a waiting congregation, what is it that I should say? Now you understand my frame of mind, as I stand before you now, awed by the responsibility to interpret God's precious truth?

Well, let me share with you some of my reactions. But first -- you'd better hear those verses again:

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities:
for we know not what we should pray for as we
ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession
for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what
is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh inter-
cession for the saints according to the will of God."

Unless you're a student of the Scriptures, unless you've taken time to sit down earnestly and pay attention very, very carefully -- as of this moment, unless you are a student of the Scriptures, you need some measure of enlightenment.

Well now, if you don't mind, let me begin in this manner. As I've studied

this passage I'm tremendously impressed by the fact that Paul is being very honest with us. He's my hero, he's my giant in the faith. Every single one of us needs giants, every single one of us needs heroes....every single one of us needs people to be put on pedestals. We need people to whom we look up.

I've always looked up to Paul, and I thank God that he was the kind of man that he was, that he did the kind of thing that he did. And wherever the Christian influence will be spread, the name of Paul will have to be dealt with and referred to with affection and esteem. Make no mistake about that.

And I'm included among some people who'd be willing to be as expansive in my mood as to say that perhaps no one -- who can tell? -- but perhaps no one has ever lived who was ever a more earnest follower of Jesus Christ than this born-again man, Paul, who counted his mission in life to go anywhere, everywhere, at any price, to do nothing less than to talk about Jesus Christ -- crucified, risen, glorified -- he went placarding the world for Jesus Christ:

"I know nothing except Jesus Christ."
...he's the man who said, "For me to live is Christ! Christ lives in me!"
He's my hero....my giant.

But I need to say this to you very parenthetically, when I study the Scriptures I'm also grateful that the Scriptures tell it just as it is. The Bible is a very honest book. It tells us good things about bad people, and it also tells us some of the weaknesses of the good people. That's one reason why some of us trust the Scriptures, it's very honest. So when I come to this passage of Scripture that Suzanne read for us as the second Lesson for the Day, my first reaction:

Paul -- you, too!

Why do I say that?

Paul -- you have the same problem that I have!

-- you, my giant in the faith!

-- you whom I believed could handle anything!

You see, what some of you don't know, when during the Lenten season I gave you a School in Prayer, when all of our Bible studies dealt with the Biblical concept of prayer -- I was needing that more than you may realize, because in my prayer life in recent weeks and months an entirely new and different dimension has been added.

I can't remember when I didn't pray, honestly I can tell you that. And two of the strongest influences on my life came from my grandmother, my maternal

grandmother.....as a child I passed by her bedroom door.....

.....she spoke only Arabic, she couldn't speak a single word of English, and I was very young, but young enough to have an impression made on me . . . her door was ajar... she was a devout Roman Catholic...and the only memory that I have of that woman has left a mark on the fabric of my soul . . . as I passed by the door I saw her sitting up in bed, with her nightgown on, and her night-cap (this goes back more than 60-some years ago)....and she had her rosary in her hands, she was saying her prayers.

To this very day before I get out of bed in the morning I say my prayers. I can't remember when prayer wasn't a very real thing to me. But in recent weeks and months there has been an entirely new and different dimension added to my prayer experience, so that I can identify with Paul so easily now -- of course it may be because my giant, my hero, my man-on-the-pedestal -- what's he saying in this verse of Scripture?

"We don't know how to pray -- likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought."

What an admission to make. We are taught to pray.

Jesus Christ realizes how essential it is that we pray because that made the difference in His life. You never really see Jesus Christ until you see Him as a Man-of-prayer. And one of the disciples -- you remember I told you this -- makes the discovery of his life when he caught Jesus praying, and he came and said, "Jesus, teach us!" . . . and Jesus stopped right then and there and said, "All right, whenever you pray -- " And then He gave us a pattern for praying. It's so essential for us that we be praying persons. And this same Jesus who taught us to pray, also said, "Ask, and it will be given to you.....

Seek, and you shall find....

Knock, and it shall be opened to you.....and if you ask anything in my name, you'll get it!"

And I've taken Him as His word, and I've asked. And I honestly believe I was asking in His name. And I haven't gotten it!

I've learned one thing through this whole encounter with praying, and that is, you have to take certain things that Jesus said and balance them out. Sometimes we fail to do that. This same Jesus who said:

"Ask . . . seek . . . find . . . knock -- and you'll get it"

is the same Jesus who said to them, "You can't have it." That's in the Bible too! Here was the request of James and John, who couldn't think of anything more wonderful -- and you couldn't either! -- I would not fault anyone if in the presence of Jesus Christ you would have done what they did, and said, "When it's all over and you're in the Kingdom, we love you so much, we cherish the thought of it -- we want to be as near to you as we possibly can. Jesus, tell us you'll do it for us!"

....and they were His friends who were asking that question....

And Jesus said, "No." It's in the Bible! They were praying, they were asking. James, said by some to be brother, or half-brother, to our Lord -- he's the one who says as he writes in the Bible -- "Sure, you pray. And you really have trouble in your praying because you ask amiss" -- this is the part of Scriptural truth with which we need to deal. It isn't that we don't pray, it's that we don't know how to pray aright.

And that's because most of us are human, as over against being spiritual in regard to our personality and our outlook on life. The person who thinks in terms only of his humanity and not of his spirituality, when he prays is always asking something from God for himself or herself.....

-- when I'm sick I want God to make me well

-- when I'm in dire circumstances I want God to free me and
get me out of that bondage, whatever it may be....

-- when I find out that there are people who don't like me, I
ask God to get into those people and to make them like me....

-- when I'm in a situation with which I cannot cope, I have to ask
God to do something about it -- to extricate me....

....that's the natural man who is praying. The natural man, when he's praying, is always trying to get God to be bent to my level. Honestly, I know you that well, and I know myself that well!

But there is such a thing as the spiritual person. Now when that person prays, it isn't that he wants God to bend to his level and to answer according to the way that person wants God to answer. But when the spiritually-minded person prays, he prays as Jesus prayed -- that what's God's will should be accomplished, that what God has in mind might come to pass. That's where you and I also have some problems. That's ~~why~~ some of us can't pray aright, because we don't have the wisdom of God. We can't see it from God's point of view, we can only see it from our limited point of view. The frank admission may have to be, as Paul himself, my giant, my hero, my man-on-the-pedestal said -- "We really don't know how to pray aright."

But that doesn't mean we should quit praying! Of course not! But there happens to be one who, when we fail to pray, takes over in our behalf, and I'll tell you a bit about that later.

My heart is always warmed when as the Pastor of this congregation I find people coming inside the church during the week to pray. Would to God I had the time and energy to be down here and open the church every morning, say at 7:00 o'clock -- or maybe every evening at 10:00 o'clock -- just to be here and to let anyone know that the doors are open and that the person is free to come, at other hours, when the church is ordinarily closed...hoping of course that they might take advantage of the opportunity to come when the church ordinarily is open. Human as we are, we need to be found in certain places where it's made easier for us to think the thoughts of God. Human as we are, we need to be in certain places where we're surrounded by things that remind us of God's presence and His truth -- the Bible, the Ceoss, the altar -- my heart is strangely warmed when I find somebody in here praying. And as you might know, I try to keep a respectful distance when someone is approaching the Throne of Grace.

But I remember and remember so well the day I passed by the door of the Chapel of The Grateful Heart, and saw a person who was a member of this parish even before I came, standing there in the middle aisle.....I could sense the desperation of the burden. As respectfully as I could I walked up and put my hand on his shoulder. He turned to me, and he told me exactly why he was there. And I recognized at once the burden that was weighing him down...and in all honesty, complete candor, all he could say was "Pastor, I've come to pray and I don't know how to pray." That's our dilemma! When we're honest, and try to pray spiritually from God's perspective we really don't even know how to talk to God in a way that God will honestly allow us to talk to Him, because we're so stained by original sin and we can be so selfish in our prayers.

But the glorious thing about this passage of Scripture from this person whom I placed on my pedestal -- Paul says, "Sure, I don't know how to pray, but I have good news for you. The Spirit takes over and the Spirit intercedes -- God knows that we don't know how to pray as we ought to pray." So God keeps Himself in the picture!

I reach back into the past every now and then to share something with you. It could have been some 35 years ago now, when I laid her husband to rest in Wildwood Cemetery in the northern part of Williamsport, Pennsylvania. She and her husband had grown up in my home town, I knew them and knew them well. And I knew the

problems with which they had to deal in life. I also knew that he was the joy of her life....I also knew he was the source of strength. He was taken suddenly, without any warning. And her whole life collapsed. She couldn't possibly think of life without him, especially when she realized the burden of responsibility which she'd have to carry by herself, a particular family problem that he had master-minded in dealing with it, and now he was gone. Bewildered and confused and beaten....as she walked away from that grave to the waiting car I can still hear, what in my judgment I can tell you was a perfect prayer -- "O, God" . . . a couple more steps we took -- "O, God!" -- and that was the groaning of her soul....

...she reached the car door: "O, God!".....

She didn't know how to pray aright--in bewilderment and in confusion, but she was praying the perfect prayer -- the groaning of her soul that was crying out to God.

In a certain sense we're all as children in God's sight. You reach a certain age -- let me prepare you for it -- when you go back into the past, and you remember. I remember so well when our boys were children, I remember so well when David and Jon, as tiny tots, would waken Winifred and me as we were sleeping by their crying. -- was it a nightmare? Something had interrupted their sleep -- we were wakened by the sobbing and the crying of a child. And with the instinct that belongs to a father and a mother, either one of us might get out of bed and go and cradle that child in our arms, a child that's sobbing, without uttering a word, but crying. And with whatever comfort we could give as a father or a mother, that comfort came as we took over. We're all as children in God's sight, we're all as children crying in the night. And God takes over.

That's what Paul's telling us -- sure, you don't know how to pray aright! You're not that good to begin with, and you don't know enough, and you don't see the whole picture. And furthermore, you have this difficulty that you get this foolish notion as though when you pray God's going to answer immediately: "Yes" -- -- "No" -- -- as though He's on the other end of the telephone. And God doesn't answer that way. God answers in the course of events! It's only a little later on that His hand is revealed and we see it. But human as we are, we want to keep God as though He's on the other end of the telephone -- we're not going to hang up until we get a "Yes" out of God.

What did Jesus say we should call God? -- "Father" -- parent -- a father and a mother don't deserve to be called 'Father' and 'Mother' if they jump through the hoops every time a child asks for something. They're worthy of the name only if when they answer, they answer according to their wisdom, as well as their love. So in this tre-

mendous two verses of Scripture Paul's saying, "It's really good news I have for you! Sure, you don't know how to pray aright, but God knows what's best! And He'll pray in your behalf if you trust Him that His will may be done.

Now let me tell you this if you don't mind, I've never wanted to be less than personal and honest with you from the very first day that I became your Pastor. And I've never hesitated to be transparent. Some years back, I've forgotten when it was, I had a problem that was more than I could handle. That happens frequently, but that was the first time in my life that I ever had one as serious as that. And so I turned the ignition key and drove all the way down from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to Gettysburg, where I needed to sit with my mentor in the faith, Harvey Daniel Hoover, the man who had married Winifred and me, the man who baptized David, the man who baptized Jon. Fortunately, he was available. We went to his study. I immediately felt relaxed because his study was more cluttered than mine!

With his great big pastor's heart he encouraged me to speak. We put the problem in front of us. And then he did something that I hope I never forget -- he said, "Let's think about it together. With whatever wisdom God gives us, let's try to think about it as earnestly and as objectively as we can."

...and after we had done that, he said, "Now, Raymond, we're going to pray." . . .

He didn't say, "Get down on your knees, Raymond -- he didn't have to tell me that because he was getting down on his knees. And on our knees together, he turned to me and he said, "Now, Raymond, you go ahead and pray first." And I did. And I laid bare my soul to God, and I tried to tell God exactly as I thought, and presumably as maybe I thought it ought to be answered. Because honestly I felt I was praying in Jesus' name.

And then he prayed. He said, "Raymond, now I'll pray." -- the substance of the words: "Dear Heavenly Father, I'm also your child, and I believe my prayer to be an honest prayer." But rooted and grounded in Scripture, Dr. Hoover concluded his prayer in this manner, as he must have remembered the words of the Apostle Paul --

"Heavenly Father, we really don't know how to pray aright, so give my brother Raymond, and give me as well, the assurance that if you can't hear his prayer, and you can't hear mine, then hear the prayer that Jesus, sitting at your right hand, is offering this very moment in our behalf."

And therein lies our hope. Cradled as children in the arms of God in our utmost need, if we will trust Him -- He takes over! And in the course of events we discover His answer as we allow ourselves to be bent according to His purpose and suited according to His will. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ALL THINGS -- FOR GOOD?"
(Romans 8: 28)

O GOD, we make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your truth. That we should make the most of it now, forgive us our sins, enlighten us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may be nurtured by Your truth. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, Who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

As I stand before you at this particular moment, my mind goes back across the years when I was a youngster in Sunday School. My debt to my Sunday School teachers will remain very, very great. From my vantage-point today, I would have to say as truthfully as the case might warrant it, some of them were not the best of Bible scholars, surely none of them was theologically literate. But they kept their appointment in Bethany Lutheran Church, Montoursville, Sunday after Sunday, and met with us youngsters in a Sunday School class situation. My debt to them is very great.

You've heard me tell you before, my father an immigrant, my mother the daughter of immigrant parents, by today's standards academically, both of them would be declared illiterate. I don't remember any of them ever reading, then, to me from the Bible. Not that they didn't revere God's Word as they read it in their own language. But much that I early learned about Scriptural truth I got from my Sunday School teachers.

I'm telling you this for two reasons. To the day I die I want always to be able to say "Thank you." That's one of the things my mother taught me.

I also remember that when I went to Sunday School, we were taught to memorize certain verses of Scripture. We had what we referred to in those days as "memory verses" or "the text for the day." Weren't they written on little cards, and they were given to us? -- and then from one Sunday to the next when we came back we'd be given a chance to recite and to show how well we had memorized what we had been assigned. To some of us it was an embarrassing moment, we didn't always remember as well as we should have....

....and then if we memorized so many, didn't we get the collection of cards, and then when we'd accumulate so many, didn't we get a pin or something?

I remember some of those verses to this day.

Some of them excited me no end....

-- John 3:16 . . . if one were to remember only one verse in the Bible,
that should be the verse above all verses --

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten
Son that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have everlasting life."

....and if I am conscious when I am dying, may those
words of Scripture be on my lips -- taught to me in Sunday School

-- and then I remember how excited I was when I was taught to memorize:

"A new commandment I give you, that you love one another."

I love people, you know that, don't you? By nature I am kindly-disposed
toward people. And I was excited to know that that was Scriptural truth,
that that's the way we're meant to behave as children of God, to love one
another. I find contention disdainful...hostility is alien to my spirit.
So I was excited, you see, when I was told to memorize that one -- love...
love....love.....

Oh, I could go on verse after verse, but I want to tell you this morning, the one
that troubled me -- and if you won't be too hard on me -- it's taken me a long, long
while, even after I memorized it years ago, to have the appreciation for that verse
that it deserves. I never fully came to grips with it until I came to finish this
sermon! Col. Clemens read it for you as the second Lesson for the day. It's from
that glorious 8th chapter of Romans. But tucked away in that 8th chapter are these
words that have literally, actually haunted me. Now don't be too hard on me, I have
a high regard for Scripture and I accept Scriptural truth. But I've had my moments
when I almost said, "I don't believe it - - I don't believe it - - I don't believe
it!" Well, here it is:

"For we know that all things work together
for good to those who love the Lord."

"All things work together for good? - - to those who love the Lord?"

Listen to this frank recital, and understand all over again why I've argued
with Paul on this text. But before I give you that recital, Paul says, "We know..."

-- he doesn't say, "It's my considered opinion . . . "

-- he doesn't say, "At this particular time in my life when the sun
is shining brilliantly and all is going well, I am happy to tell you
that everything that happens works for good to those who love the
Lord . . . "

-- he didn't happen to say, "According to the basis of my experience
this far in life, I want you to know that I'm inclined to think that

this could be so . . . " Not at all!
It's as positive as it can be - - "We know."

-- not: "I think . . . "

-- not: "I'm inclined to accept this as a possibility . . . "

but: "We know . . . "

I have had my moments when I think it could have been written by Paul in one of his better days, when all was going well. I remember not so long ago in a Confirmation class, while we were trying to pass some time until the class formally began, I said to a youngster, "Did you have a good day today?"

...and he said, "Yup - yup - had a good day."

And then I said to him, "Well, what makes a good day?"

...and God bless him, he simply answered,

"When nothing goes wrong."

And that's the way it is for a number of people - - things are wonderful as long as nothing goes wrong. And even though God put His imprimatur on this world when He created it, and said, "It's good" - - evil came into the picture. And you can't deny it.

Now my recital. I've had this running argument with Paul who says:

"Everything works together for good to those
who love the Lord"

but still, "Everything works together for good"?

....you could walk it in less than five minutes, I dare say, maybe a little bit more, from where you're seated right now -- you go out on the Highland Drive entrance or exit, you take the oblique to the left, that's Fairview Road....you walk to the end of Fairview Road and you come to the public parking lot nearest to this place...

-- in broad daylight - it's still unsolved - a woman walks unsuspectingly to her car, accosted by a man with a gun, who shoots her in cold blood -- just like that!

...that's evil! What good comes from that?

...Pastor David told me once when he looked out the second story of 1006 Dale Drive, before the Enlarged Facility was constructed, when we had parking directly below, behind us,....

--very early in the morning he saw a woman walking across the parking lot, with her hand-bag stringing along by her side... a car comes down Highland Drive, stops abruptly, engine remains running, the door remains open, the man runs across the parking

lot, grabs the woman's purse, back to the car, off he goes!

...this thing works together for good? -- that's evil!

....I'd just been at prayers in the Chapel of The Grateful Heart, some time ago....within a matter of minutes, not the first house, the parsonage of the Senior Pastor, the second house -- the third house, right next door to us...

-- an intruder, at mid-day, brutally attacks the young mother with her precious children, and escapes --

"...all things work together for good"?

-- this family that goes to Mass on Sunday --

"...to those who love the Lord"?

I've had trouble with this text. I'm being very honest with you. And I've argued with Paul. Evil is evil, and evil is in this world. And when you say "All things" you're embracing everything, and that means you embrace evil. But I can't shake Paul of his conviction. I've tried. The Scripture still remains: "We know" -- and evidently it included a number of people with him who stood on that same solid ground.

Now listen to this. I'm going to read it for you so you don't miss a single word.....

" . . . At the end of August, 1967, Susan, a fine young American girl of eighteen was packing her suitcases prior to her going on holiday, when a violent man broke into her home and attacked her. After a fierce struggle Susan escaped and staggered down the lane, battered, stabbed and dying, to collapse and to die in her grandmother's arms a hundred yards away.

What a tragedy for her parents, what a tragedy for her brother Ed. What a tragedy for her grandmother. . . . "

"All things work together for good"?

Paul, I'm still having trouble with that. You said it. I want to believe. By the time this sermon is concluded -- relax! -- you will be given to know in no uncertain way that I can say, "Paul, move over -- move over, Paul! I understand, I'm with you. I say the same thing!"

What is this certainty then, that Paul had, in view of the fact that every one of us has either gone through a time of deep distress, when all the lights go out -- or will go out at some time to come. No doubt, I'm convinced after all these years in the ministry, that none escapes it. And I'm convinced this morning as I stand before you that we can do nothing more useful than discover what this mastery of commitment, what this mastery of conviction really is, and what it's meant to do for us. I am convinced that all things do not work together for good because that's the same as saying that whatever it is that happens, evil as it may be, that it's all right! And I can't say that.

I still believe that there is such a thing as evil in the world. I'm numbered among those who unhesitatingly admit that I believe in a personal devil. I believe in the force of evil. I believe in Satan -- that there is Satan. If I didn't believe it for any other reason I'd believe it for this reason: as evidenced by the girl who came from a fundamentalist home, and went off to college and was exposed to a liberal professor who pooh-poohed the idea of a personal devil, and said, "Have done with it! It's an idea that's run its course, we've outgrown it, it's excess baggage! Free yourself from the notion that there's such a thing as Satan."

...and God bless her, all that she could do was this, as she addressed the professor: "Sir, if you say there is no such thing as Satan, then will you please tell me who it is that's carrying on his work?"

And the evidence of evil remains.

Now what are you going to do with this text? -- "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord" -- I found help by going beyond that King James translation, which I love, and on which I was reared. The New English Bible translation, the Revised Standard version, helps me tremendously -- listen how they put it for us, which sheds a brand new light...."For we know that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord" -- all things work together for good -- that's what troubled me.

-- the New English Bible said:

"In every thing, as we know, he cooperates for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose."

-- or the Revised Standard Version:

"We know that in every thing God is working for good for those who love him"

Now there! -- that's what I have been waiting for! Evil is evil, and evil exists. But God is always greater.

On my shelves I have a book that bears a fascinating title: "God Is Always Greater" ...and this God of ours, the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is at work even while evil is at work -- and to those who love Him, He cooperates with us in learning how to handle that evil that may so easily beset us. God will not be out-done by evil. Evil remains the second most powerful force in the world, it never gets beyond that. God is always greater...."We know then that in everything God is working for good, and for those who love him." -- Now that simply means that you and I have to keep ourselves in love with God, that means we have to keep our eyes focused on God, that means we have to keep our relationship with God vital -- and as we keep our rela-

tionship vital with God He will not abandon us.

You can be crippled by the evil that confronts you, it can be debilitating, it can do it. Or on the other hand, if you put your trust in God, and you keep your eye on God, God says, "I will go to work with you." Evil is not ruled out....but God says, "I will not let it do you in."

It's been said that one of the most effective sermons to be preached in recent years is the sermon of a black preacher whose title for that sermon was simply this:

"IT'S FRIDAY - - BUT SUNDAY'S COMING!"

It's crucifixion....but God has a resurrection on His schedule.

Let me go on now and finish this for you:

" . . . What a tragedy for her parents, her brother Ed and her grandmother . . . "

...[this 18-year-old who was attacked and died. Yet somehow her family found God's Spirit cooperating with them, even in that ghastly murder, and a month later Susan's mother wrote a wonderful letter to a minister friend....listen now to the letter:

" . . Isn't it a good thing that we can't see into the future? Who could have imagined such a tragedy that day we parted? Even now it doesn't seem possible. Nobody can tell me that this was God's will. I know better. He had other plans for Sue's life, I'm quite sure. But I'm equally sure that He can use this horrible thing in some way for His glory and for His Kingdom.

For one thing, it has had an impact on Ed and other young people in the community, it has made them think as they had never thought before. It has made me get back into youth work in the church. I've taken the intermediate class, and my husband the senior youth. We realized as never before the importance of young people growing up with God . . . "

(Now you'll understand why she's saying this when you hear this, as Susan's mother continued)

" . . . I have no doubt in my mind that Sue was ready to die. And then as my Uncle Edward said, she's unfolding her bags on the other side. All the same her passing has left a deep, deep hole in our lives, and I feel at times that my heart will break.

Her funeral was a triumphant occasion: Bach - "A Mighty Fortress" - "O Jesus, I Have Promised" . . .

(She continues in this, her letter to her minister friend)

" . . . We're taking up the threads of our lives again now, and though the pattern won't be what we had planned, we pray it will still be beautiful -- even more so for having had my Susan for 18 happy years . . . "

That's a wonderful letter, and the man who put it in front of me and said that I could share it with you says, "It's almost too sacred to quote." But there shines through it clearly this perfect confidence and trust in God that in all things God can still be at work to those who love Him, and focus their attention upon Him, who make Him their primary loyalty.

Now I must tell you this: as you know I have never hesitated to be transparent and honest and frank and personal. One of the grandest gentlemen that I've ever known, one of God's noblemen, Elwood Francis DeLong . . . as an octogenarian he did for us the Chapel of The Grateful Heart. Occasionally we would have chats together. He'd tell me about his past, he'd tell me about his struggles, he'd tell me about the things he had to endure. It was not always an easy life. There wasn't a cloud on my horizon. And so I suppose he seemed in duty bound to talk to me as a father would talk to his son -- as much as to say,

"Raymond, it's bound to come, but don't let it do you in -- don't let anything in life -(tell your people this)- debilitate them and cripple them. Go on to write the next chapter. Try a new beginning."

And then he said something that's absolutely superb, and to the day I die I hope I'll never forget it. Listen carefully now for the conclusion, just don't stop at mid-point. He said,

"Raymond, just don't go on living just somehow. Go on living triumphantly."

Said the Apostle Paul: "We know" -- God cooperates with us,

- - God's our helper,
- - God's our friend,
- - God's our strength
- - God is always greater.

Will you do me a favor? -- remind me of the words that I'm about to use as this sermon ends. Help me never to forget them. This I do believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NOTHING BUT THE FACTS"

CLEANSE US, O GOD, by Your Holy Spirit,
that we may be made fit to think Your
thoughts as we give some attention to
the interpretation of Your Holy Word.
Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord,
Who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

Math 15: 21-22

For the life of me I can't quite remember the name of the show — it was one of those early television shows back in the 50's. It had a detective in it...he wore a felt hat, if I remember correctly, and a double-breasted suit. And the line that I recall more than anything — "just the facts, ma'am, just the facts — nothing but the facts." I never cease to marvel at the number of people who want facts, but don't know how to handle facts. There are any number of people who when they get the facts, either misinterpret them, misconstrue them, or mis-perceive them. Let me give you an excellent case in point: the Gospel Lesson for the day.

Whether you realize it or not, there are at least three shockers in that Gospel Lesson, and all of them as a matter of fact — a portrayal of Jesus Christ which is so unlike Jesus Christ, but still as a matter of fact. Let me recall it for you. It's straight, seven verses right out of the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.....

...Jesus has crossed over now from Galilee, the border that leads into Syria, the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon. Now for whatever reason that took Him there, that's where He happens to be — that's a fact.

And while He's there He's encountered by a Canaanite woman, a Syro-Phoenician woman. That means that she was not of the Jewish faith. And as she encounters Jesus Christ she cries out to Him, she wants His attention, she has a great need. And the need is not her own but the need is for her daughter, according to Scripture, who is "grievously vexed by a devil."

Now get ready for three facts, each one shocking in turn.

- - She yells, she shouts, she tries to get Jesus' attention --
and He answers her not a word. That's a fact.
- - the second thing, when she continues to try to get His attention in her earnest desire to get her daughter healed, He says something about not being sent except to

the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That's a fact. It's a shocking fact! It cuts! It's not pleasant. It wasn't easy for her to hear it.

...so unlike Jesus, this behavior pattern. He who had taken the initiative to go out of His way to do something good to somebody -- you can't picture Jesus going down the street just waiting for people to come to Him, of course you can't! He was the kind of person who was always taking the initiative.

Some 40 miles from the town where Winifred and I used to live there's a town in Columbia County called Benton, Pennsylvania, the birthplace of one of the most remarkable persons who's ever lived in recent years. That's where Frank Laubach, the father of the literacy method, was born. There are several things that you ought to know about Frank Laubach....

- - he wasn't simply given to "each one teach one" - - he didn't just subscribe to the fact that what good will it be if people are taught to read if they're not taught to read the right thing? - - and to that he threw himself with complete abandon. If we're going to be taught to read, then for God's sake, Frank Laubach maintained, be sure you read the right things. That's where he had a great concern for the Scriptures.....

But what I want to tell you about him now, quite incidentally -- and yet not too incidentally -- he was the kind of a person who if he were seated in a bus or a train, or an airplane, he'd focus his attention on someone. He didn't take his eyes off of that person. And you know exactly what would happen, if you've ever experimented with that kind of thing - - eventually the person turns around and the pair of eyes meet.....and Laubach also established the "CIHYOU" method - "Can I Help You?" -- taking the initiative. Always in this world there are people in need. Jesus was that kind of person. But now -- would you believe it! -- so unlike Jesus.

Here is a woman screaming and yelling -- say it again -- anyone who's spent any time at all in the Middle East knows how people seeking pity can make a scene and a demonstration, and won't give up until they get some kind of attention paid to them. And Jesus gives her the shocker for the second time. In fact this Gospel Lesson has three shockers in it:

-- the first one was the silent treatment -- "He answered her not a word"
That's a fact.

-- and the second fact: "I'm not sent except to the children of Israel, the lost sheep" . . . as much as to say, "I'm not obligated to

to pay attention to you. My mission in life is the lost children of Israel, and you're not one of them."

So unlike Jesus. But it's a fact!

Then the third shocker. Jesus said something about "You don't take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." -- that's a fact! Jesus said it! Three times, Jesus the shocker -- the one of whom we usually think: gentle Jesus, meek, mild, compassionate, considerate -- taking the initiative to pay attention to somebody -- giving this woman -- -- the only reason she comes to Him is because she's a mother, and is concerned about her child.

Let me say it again, I am deeply troubled by people who take facts and mis-construe them, mis-interpret them, mis-conceive them. There are people who have done that with this passage of Scripture. You can read in some commentaries that there are people who take the same set of facts that I've just given you, and said that Jesus crossed over the border into Syria because He was very tired, He was being harrassed by the Pharisees, He wanted a respite. He was annoyed by the fact that He had done as much as He had done for the Children of Israel and was not getting a very good reception. There are those who say that this is a fact, He answered her not a word, He didn't pay attention to her because He says to Himself, if the Jewish people haven't responded, why should I waste my time on her? So that's the way some people can handle a fact -- mis-perceive it, mis-construe it.

There are also people who say He was tired, He was weary. He wanted to get away from Galilee, He needed rest. And this woman screaming and yelling, came as an irritant.

It's a fact that He didn't answer her.

It's a fact that He said what He did.

It's a fact that He talked about casting crumbs to dogs -- that's right.

Do I have to beg you to give Jesus Christ credit for always being a gentleman? Do I have to take you to task for allowing this passage of Scripture to cause you undue trouble? Let me help you as best I can. It's a magnificent chapter, it's a tremendous interpretation of the way Jesus puts a person's faith to the test.

You see, whenever you deal with facts you have to be careful how you interpret them, and give yourself time to come to what is essentially the bottom line -- where does the matter essentially rest? No matter what the road was that you traveled to get to a particular point, for God's sake don't lose yourself being overly concerned by the incidentals that have happened along the way. What really matters most is the way you record the data at the bottom line. And the bottom line in this case is:

"O woman, be it unto thee even as thou wilt,
for great is thy faith" - - and her daughter
was made whole right then and there!

Now, two things if you don't mind.

One, Jesus Christ has a way of testing people. We're always being tested. You'd be surprised sometimes, whether wittingly or unwittingly, what we really are will surface as we encounter people. That's one of the values, you see, in allowing people to talk. Eventually you discover where they're coming from, and where they've been. Jesus by deliberate design gave her not only the silent treatment but the shocking treatment, in order for her to reveal her real self. No question about it.

And one of the grand and glorious things to be said about this passage of Scripture is that if you want to you can take it as a case study in the way a person accepts one-self where one happens to be:

-- she was not of the Jewish faith. This she admitted, and accepted.

-- she had not had the benefit of all of the training that the
other people had had that Jesus had encountered, not even
the disciples

It's a marvelous case study in a person willing to accept herself where she happens to be.

And that's a problem for any number of us. For any number of us it's extremely difficult for us to accept ourselves as we are. That's the great task, you see, of the psychologists and the psychiatrists and the counsellors -- to somehow set in front of us, in due process, the real image. But it does trouble me sometimes when we spend too much of our energies talking about sublimation, then, or self-analysis, or reality. There comes a point where one has to recognize a measure of dependence upon someone other than himself or herself, in order to become better than one has been, or is. And this is the marvelous contribution that religion has to offer you and me. The Christian faith is always introducing us to Jesus Christ, and eventually if we give ourselves time He looms upon the horizon in one way or another. And when He does come, He puts us to the test as to whether or not we're going to hold out long enough until we reach the point where we say "I surrender." And that's exactly what this woman did. She surrendered herself and all that she was into the hands of Jesus Christ -- regardless of His delaying tactics, regardless of the struggle that had to be endured. She kept at it, until she said, "You win!"

But she put up a struggle in the meantime. And she assumed a measure of responsibility for herself even as she accepted herself where she was.,, "Talk about eating crumbs? Talk to me that way, God - - tell me that's my station in life. But tell me I don't have

to stay there, tell me I don't belong there."

They used to tell the story about an evangelist in London who ministered in the slums, who chalked up one of the great moments in his life when he encountered the habitual drunkard, who looks up into the eyes of the padre and says, "Go ahead, Padre, tell me where I am -- drunk, in the gutter -- but for God's sake, Padre, tell me I don't have to stay there! This Syro-Phoenician woman - - "Tell me, Jesus -- I'm going to stick with it. I'm going to keep coming back at you! Try me, test me as you will." Sooner or later every person is responsible for the way they give evidence of their own basic integrity. That's the kind of time and that's the kind of treatment that Jesus was giving this woman. Can't you take heart from this, then, that we are made of that kind of stuff? -- that we can be made equal even to the test to which Jesus Christ puts us? We don't have to cower, we don't have to wallow in self-pity. In the face of the struggle God made us with enough stuff that we can keep coming back, no matter how we think He delays. Now that's one thing you daren't forget in this magnificent chapter of Scripture.

And the second thing is this: He had to stick with it, and she had to stick with it, until the data for the bottom line could be written. Jesus Christ doesn't reward us on the basis of little faith. You may read the Scripture repeatedly and you'll discover that His sublime compliment always goes to those to whom He can say, "Be it unto thee, for great is thy faith" - - and every now and then pays someone the supreme compliment and He says, "You can have what you want because your faith is great enough." The trouble with any number of us is we have a faith, but it's only a little faith -- it can take us only so far down the road, just like last Sunday's sermon, with Peter walking on the water. He just had enough faith to get him out there, to stand up. But he didn't have enough faith to keep him walking in the direction of Jesus Christ.

Don't you remember the letter that I read for you some time ago from that woman who hasn't been able to come to Saint Luke Church for a number of years, and only last year, I think it was, she gathered enough strength to be here for the baptism of her grandchild.....a woman who finds every single hour of the day and night an ordeal. And in that letter that she wrote me she said, "Pastor, if it were not for the faith that I have -- and it's great faith, I could not have endured. Pastor, tell your people that a little faith won't do it! It has to be great faith."

Now, you and I need to keep ourselves in the struggle. She didn't give up. The bottom line is, Jesus said, "You have great faith." Let me make it as simplistic as possible - - only great faith gets the complimentary reward! And keep before you that hope that it's possible. There's always the possibility of the great Amen. And that's how this passage of Scripture ends, with that triumphant Amen.

Sir Arthur Sullivan put it for us one day - -

"Seated one day at the organ, I was weary and ill at ease,
And my fingers wandered idly over the noisy keys;
I knew not what I was playing, or what I was dreaming then,
But I struck a chord of music like the sound of a great Amen.
It flooded the crimson twilight like the close of an angel's song,
And it lay on my fevered spirit with a touch of an infinite calm."

That's the lesson that comes to us straight from this set of facts. Somewhere along the line there is the possibility for this woman of striking that magnificent chord that would end with a great Amen. "To give up pretentions," writes William James, "is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified." - - and that isn't only psychology, it's religion. There is a way of accepting what we are, and instead of sitting down on it, with all the unlovely results of self-pity, you begin with it, and you're motivated by the possibility of a glorious Amen. It is not a matter of resignation. Life begins when it becomes a matter of surrender to Jesus Christ, no matter what the treatment may be in the meantime.

Of the merchants' adventures of Elizabeth's day these inspired words were written:

"They dared beyond their strength,
They hazarded against their judgment;
And in extremities they were of excellent hope."

The saviors of this world today are those who go on in brave assurance that despite every evidence to the contrary, this is God's world. And He has a way of rewarding those who persevere with their faith. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.

Year 1993

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

Nov. 28, 1993

Mark 13:33-37

(Prepared by Sheila Fisher (2/1/2012)

Advent I - 1993

Mark, 13:33-37

"Keep your eyes open, keep on the alert for
you do not know when the time will be."

Christians are instructed people.

At great pain, Jesus in the final chapter of
His life, instructed His followers: there will always
be the hour of accountability; the crucial moment
could come at any time: Christians are meant
to live in the present in the light of a certain
future; but the exact time of the certain
remains uncertain: conclusion: Christians
are instructed to live the life of the
alert.

Question: alert to what?

Answer: the early Christians who heeded
this instruction by Christ took it
seriously: Jesus will return.

Question: How does the preacher
make this truth relevant for
today's Christian?

- the creed remains the
constant reminder: He
will come again; but
for what purpose?

Answer: to judge

Question: to judge whom?
for what? how?



(2)

- the text admonishes : "keep your eyes open"
- but what good does it do to have opened eyes if one does not know what he/she should be looking for?

Question : ^{are} for what ~~do~~ Christians being admonished to look?

Answer : The one to whom we are ultimately accountable.

~~become~~
- lesson : don't waste time with those whose judgments have no value

Question : How does one maintain as one alert for "the returning Christ"?

Answer : by constant recollection of Christ's imminence (the value to be placed upon the ^(a)recitation of the Credo -- ^(b)the reading of the Gospels -- renewing the life of piety (c) by relying on the resources available to us : the gifts of the spirit

③

"It is as if a man who is travelling abroad had left his house and handed it over to be managed by his servants --"

- the text is an illustration of how Jesus could make His teachings relevant
- an illustration His hearers could understand -- to which they could relate.

Question:

- what does this illustration imply?

Answer:

Above all else it implies trust / confidence
* by the Master in the servants: the blessed realization that we can live in this world as ones worthy of divine trust.

Question: Does not the Master take a risk?

Answer: Yes - life is never without some risk

Conclusion: Christ places confidence in His followers by giving them the freedom to manage in His absence --

but the absent Christ is always
* * the Christ who will return: so Christians are stabilized by no great assurance



④

= He has given each one his work to do,
and has ordered the doorkeeper to be on
the look-out ---

~~Question:~~

Conclusion from this text:

- ① - the Christian lives daily with
assigned order - individually
assigned order: how does one know what
his/her assigned order is?
- ② - the Christian concerns himself / herself
with his/her assignment while
often one charged with the
responsibility of look-out duty

Question: who contributes
in the Christian experience
the role of the doorkeeper?

- who are they who
are equipped / equipped / positioned
to wear it?

Answer: parents, pastor, teachers,
prophets

Question: how do they perform
their duty?

(5)

= Just so must you keep a look-out,
for you do not know when the master
of the house will come - it might be
late evening, or ~~not~~ ^{midnight}, or cock-crow
or early morning - otherwise he might come
unexpectedly and find ~~you~~ ^{you are} asleep. What
I am saying to you - I am saying to
all - keep on the alert --"

Observation - (a) the instruction that
Christ gives He gives to each of
us -- none dares to believe
that Christ's instruction does not
apply to him / to her

(b) the emphasis remains; the
specific time of accountability
can be any time - no
one knows

(c) Christians are admonished to
constantly expect the unexpected

Conclusion: Christians can never say that
they have not been warned!
We are meant to be in this
world as the prepared ones -
and therein lies the hope
for the world - an awesome truth!